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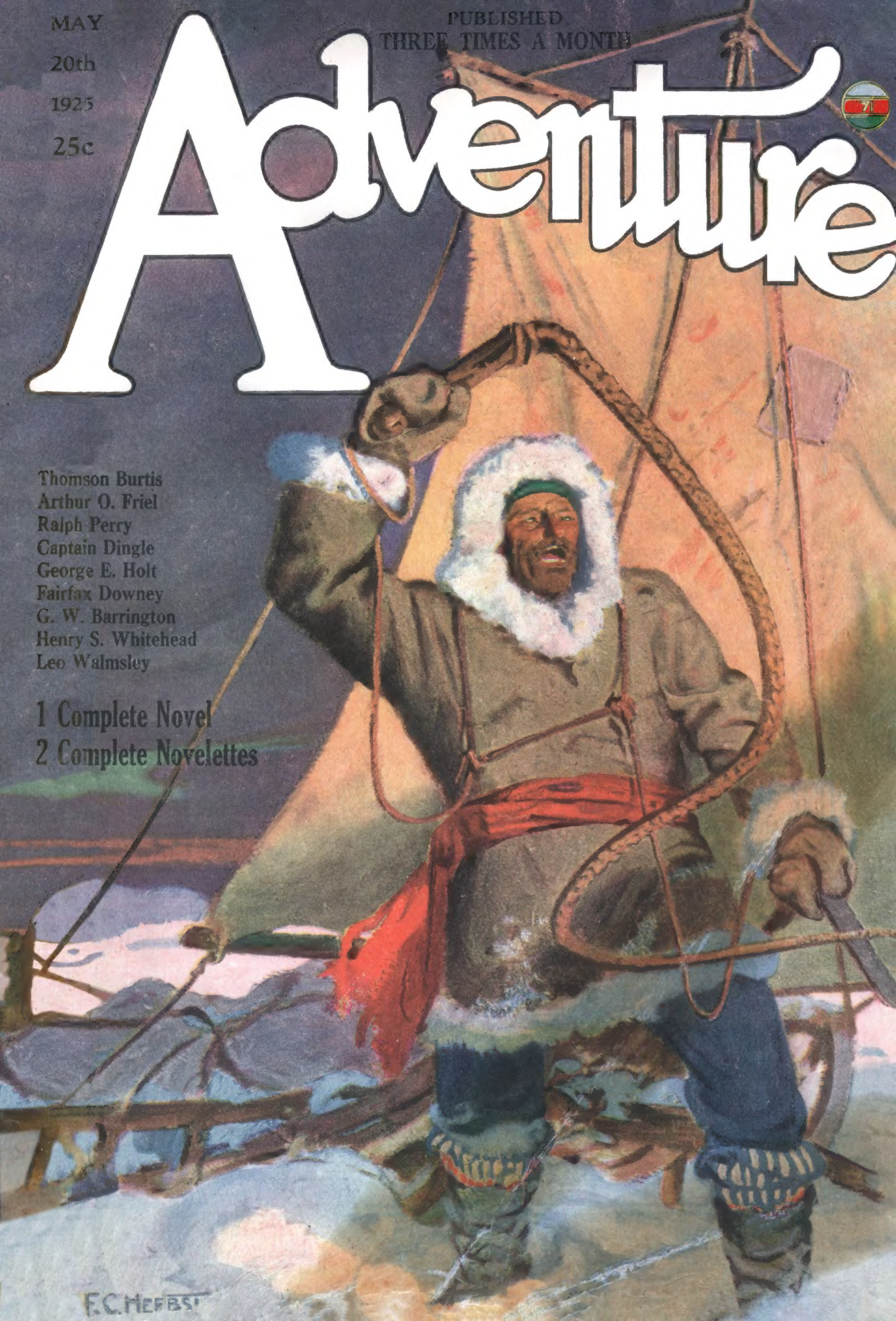
Adventure



Thomson Burtis
Arthur O. Friel
Ralph Perry
Captain Dingle
George E. Holt
Fairfax Downey
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Henry S. Whitehead
Leo Walmsley

1 Complete Novel
2 Complete Novelettes

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ADVENTURE
May 20th, 1925

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Volume 52
Number 5

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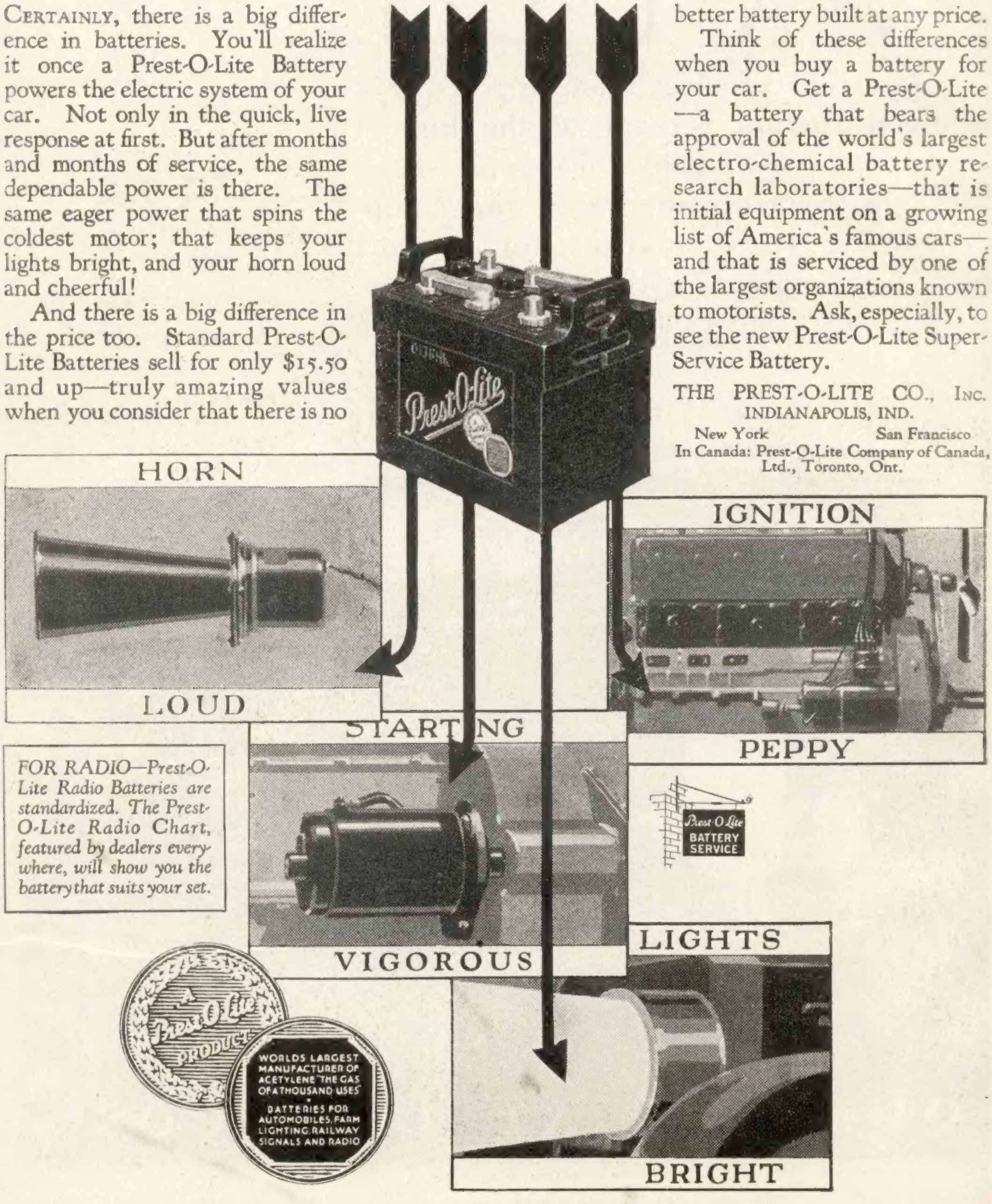
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Vol. LII No 5
Adventure
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Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in advance
Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian postage, 90 cents.

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising seventy geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons, Fishing, Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, North American, Anthropology, Health on the Trail, Railroading, Herpetology and Entomology.

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A New Serial and Three Complete Novelettes

HUGH PENDEXTER

PLACER mining was on the wane in California Gulch and *Frank Ellis* was down to his last penny. But he could sing the old home songs to suit the miners' taste and he could wait on table like a professional. The combined talents got him a steady job, but they got him into more trouble than placer mining ever had. "PARDS," a serial in five parts by Hugh Pendexter, will start in the next issue.

THE fat captain, the timorous mate, the dishonest Englishman, the lying Chinaman, the revengeful halfbreed—all these must fight and get their due before the *Hshee Chong* can enter port. "A DETECTIVE OF THE SEAS" is a complete novelette by James Aton in the next issue.

AFTER *Sergeant Whipple* let three Piegan breeds escape from the Mounted Police post there were but two courses open to him and one meant disgrace. "HARD LINES " a complete novelette, by William Byron Mowery, is in the next issue.

"*KOLA*, I can make you the greatest emir that ever sat on a sheepskin in El Nadir," said *Bayliss*. "A PRINCE OF AFRICA" is a complete novelette, by T. Samson Miller, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

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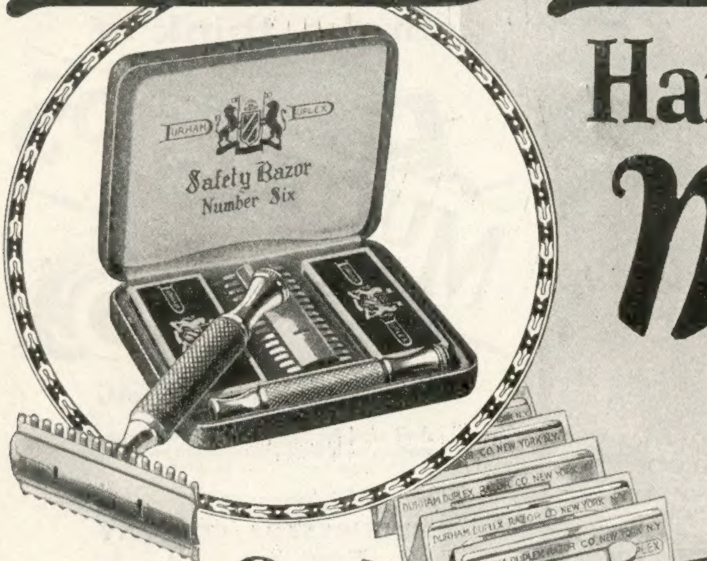
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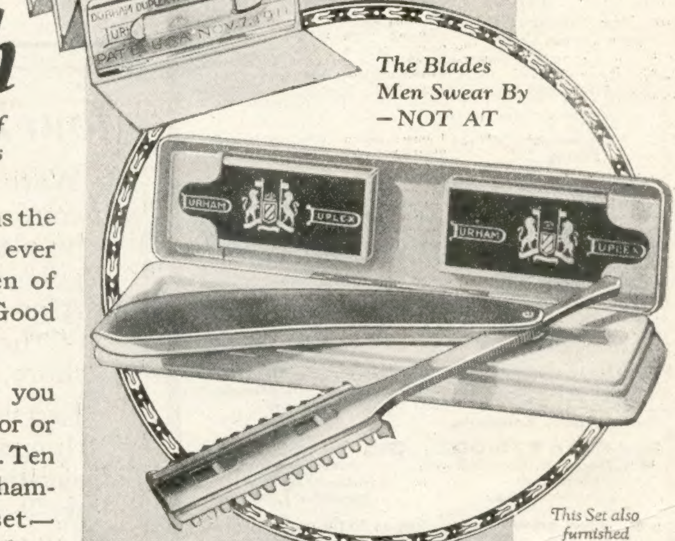
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G. Washington's Coffee Apple Filling 1 pound apples, pared and grated, 1 pound powdered sugar, rind and juice 3 lemons, ¼ pound sweet butter, 2 well beaten eggs, 1 tablespoon G. Washington's Coffee, 1 cup finely chopped pecans, (optional). Put apples, sugar, rind and juice of lemons with butter into upper vessel of double boiler, place over hot water over moderate fire, and when butter is melted add well beaten eggs and cook until thick—about 15 minutes—stirring frequently. When cooked add the G. Washington's Coffee, dissolved in 1 tablespoon hot water, and the pecans if used. When cold spread between layers of cake.

G. Washington's Coffee Frosting ¾ teaspoon G. Washington's Coffee, dissolved in ¾ cup boiling water, grated rind 1 orange, 1 tablespoon orange juice, 1½ cups brown sugar, ½ cup butter, ¾ cup thin cream, 1 egg yolk. Cook together all ingredients except egg yolk until a little tested in cold water forms soft ball. Cool slightly, add beaten egg yolk and beat until thick enough to spread.

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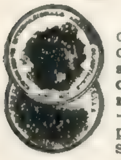

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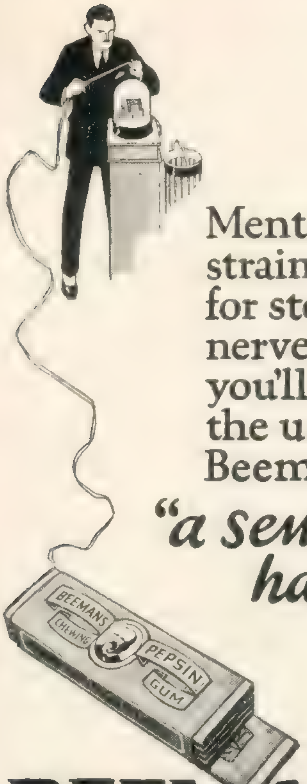

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May 20 1925
Vol. LII No. 5

SHIELDS of ISLAM

A COMPLETE NOVEL

George E. Holt

Author of "The Hand of Allah," "One Moorish Sultan," etc.

> "Walk not proudly in the land, for thou canst not cleave the earth, neither shalt thou equal the mountains in stature."—*Al Koran.*

THROUGH the big, cool gateway which penetrates the eastern wall of Tangier city, connecting the Moorish town and the beach of the bay, a horseman passed with a friendly salutation to the red-coated, yellow-trousered guard on duty. He clattered up the cobbled *Siageen*, or main street, lined on either side with little shops, and into the *soco-chico*, the little marketplace, where French and German and Spanish cafés offered pleasant seats and refreshing beverages. He drew rein before the Café Español because its face was shaded by its squat body from the noon-day sun. An empty chair and a lonesome, round, marble-topped table with excessively bowed legs seemed to smile a welcome to him. A Moorish urchin in abbreviated brown *djellaba* and a distinctly soiled round red cap, popped out of the passing throng to grasp bridle reins, to hold the horse for as long as might be necessary to gain the reward of a Spanish copper *perra-chica* or two.

The man who swung from the saddle and stalked with the stiff-kneed gait of the habitual rider to the little round table, was of medium height, slender, wiry. His lean, narrow face, pinched by exposure, was browner than that of many a native Moor

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who passed and was as dark as the faces of the Berber countrymen among the Anghera hills in the east whence he had just come. To the experienced observer it was a face refashioned by sun and wind and water, the face of a man who knew companionship with all of "the winds that tramp the world."

He slapped yellow dust from his khaki riding clothes, using for the purpose a broad-brimmed hat which quite obviously was six or seven thousand miles from its western American home, gave an order to the white-aproned Spanish servant who appeared beside him, and sank lazily into the chair. A man, of age anywhere between thirty and forty—the desert sun and the mountain winds and ocean spray do not use the same price marks on a human face as does the city; they subtract years from age in order to add them to youth.

One needed only a glance at the sharp, blue-gray eyes of this man who now smacked his lips over a whiskey and soda, to know that mountain, sea, and desert were his friends. James J. Travers, American, was returned to Tangier after a month's shooting of wild boar with his native friend Achmido of Ain Barid, a little village near Tetuan.

Travers, lighting a cigaret, viewed idly the passing throng of man and beast—barelegged Moors in flapping, graceful *sulhams* and *djellabas* of white and blue and gray and brown and all the colors of the rainbow; Jews in black gabardeens and black skull caps; brown countrymen in brown *djellabas* of coarse homespun, with little rosettes of many colors; Riffian Berbers in water proof cloaks of dark camel hair, on the broad backs of which were embroidered the *assegais* of good luck; stately native officials swathed in immaculate white *k'sas* riding past upon gaudily caparisoned mules, accompanied by their personal guards in uniform; consular and diplomatic officials of a dozen nations with such native attendants as their official positions demanded.

Now and then a native woman bundled from head to heels in heavy white *haik*, with only inquisitive dark eyes showing discreetly from behind her head covering and four inches of ankle showing between the bottom of the *haik* and the heavy-soled, scarlet heelless slippers, fluttered by like a day-time ghost. And in with the humanity, beasts of burden—stubborn, objecting burros, laden with cases of goods thrice as big as themselves; mules plodding sturdily along with crates of native or foreign goods for barter; a string of half a dozen camels passing through the marketplace bearing huge bags of grain and causing a traffic pandemonium for a space.

But while the American drank his beverage, burned cigarets, and eyed the varied throng idly, his mind was considering many things. Now the business which had brought him to Morocco again was ended, as well as the ensuing month of recreation, he would soon be returning home.

He had come to Morocco at the insistence of his friend and sometimes chief, "Emperor" Lee, president of the All-American Metals Corporation; had come because of his intimate knowledge of the country, to secure for the All-American the mining concession for the province of Zemmur. He had been successful, perhaps not so much through his own efforts as through the strange and secret operations of that mysterious force known as "The Hand of Allah."

It disturbed him, this Hand of Allah, whenever he thought of it. It seemed to be at the same time both a person and an organization. He did not feel that the years he had spent in Morocco should have made him know what this thing was. He realized as he could not have done had he not spent years in the country, that he might rub elbows with a powerful native force and not recognize it; that the youth who now held his horse might tell him, if he would, of native forces of which he had never dreamed.

His chief and only knowledge of Morocco was the knowledge of his ignorance. He knew that what a foreigner, an American or a European, could learn in a year or in five years was as nothing, that a life time spent among the Moors would give one only a little preception of the present-day result of the four thousand years during which civilization after civilization—Phœnician, Roman, Arab, Berber, Spanish, English, all mixed with Hebrew—had come and gone, each leaving a residue to be absorbed by its successor; he knew that the mental processes of the boy who held his horse might be as much Phœnician or Roman or Arab as they were Moorish. Time stopped in Islam when Mohamed the Prophet announced his laws.

However, Travers reflected, the game was finished, and shortly he would be sailing westward to a land where the five daily prayers were unknown and the name of Allah held in no esteem, where men might do as they desired instead of obeying that which was written upon their foreheads by an inescapable fate.

HE ROSE and mounted and within five minutes was reminded with great force that although the future may not be written upon one's forehead, it is unavoidable. He rode to his quarters at the Hotel Cavilla, and there upon the balcony came face to face with a girl who, at sight of him, stretched her azure eyes in amazement and uttered a musical little squeak of surprise.

"Why—why— Where is daddy?" she gasped.

Travers in amazement stared back into blue eyes; he had met Emperor Lee's daughter on more than one occasion.

"Your father?" he asked blankly. "Why—is he here?"

The girl's eyes grew wider.

"Is he here! Didn't he come back with you?"

"Back?" puzzled Travers. "I don't get you, Miss Violet. He hadn't been with me at all. I just arrived from——"

"Hasn't been with you at all? Why, you telegraphed him at Gibraltar that you were in Arzila—and in trouble—and for him to come at once."

"I did?" Travers now was more than puzzled; vision of a new plot afoot shot into his head.

"Yes. Why—he telegraphed you from—from Granada—telling—asking you to meet him here. And you answered you couldn't, but would be in Arzila. And we came here yesterday and he started right away for—for—for Arzila. Oh, Mr. Travers! What is it all about?"

"By gollies, you can search me, Miss Violet," replied Travers inelegantly. "But I received no message from him, and I didn't send one."

"Oh-h! Then it's a—a trick—a plot."

In Violet's voice was a certain fear, and a certain satisfied excitement as well. Travers, noting both tones, smiled grimly.

"Yes," he agreed, "I reckon it's a trick. Why did your father come here?"

"Why — why — Mr. Travers — I don't really know, except—except that he made a deal with the Duke of—Duke of—Oh, that big Spanish duke who owns so many mines here——"

"De las Torres," offered Travers.

"Oh yes, that's it. De las Torres. Well, he and daddy made some sort of a deal together—and I heard a lot about Tangier—and in the Alhambra at Granada I seemed to see brave Moorish knights rescuing imprisoned princesses—and—I wanted to come to Tangier, so I asked daddy. At first he didn't want to come—but after a while—Well, I guess I cried——"

She broke off abruptly at Travers' quick nod.

"I understand," he said. "But about the Duke de las Torres, and this deal of your father's. Do you know just what it was? It might be important to be sure."

The girl gazed at him for a space doubtfully.

"I'm not sure," she answered finally. "I think he is going to give the duke some money—a lot of money——"

"How much?" broke in Travers.

"I don't know for certain. Ten millions I think."

"Huh!" Travers snorted. "All right. And for what?"

"For an interest in the duke's iron mines in—Mar—Mar——"

"Mar Chica—yes. Did he pay the money?"

"I—I don't think so. He bought an—an option, do you call it?"

"Option, yes. All right, please go on."

"That's—that's all I know."

"And having bought a ten-million-dollar interest in a hard-boiled war, as well as the enmity of every Socialist and Anarchist among the common people of Spain and of every Moor who loves his country, Emperor Lee calmly walks into the arms of said enemies. *Allah kerim!*"

"But Mr. Travers. What do you mean? He just bought an interest in some mines. That's all. He didn't buy any wars or Socialists or Anarchists."

Travers shrugged.

"But he did, Miss Violet. Absolutely. The people of Spain don't want the war to continue. The people of Morocco will fight to the last man. And your father probably has just added ten million dollars to the war chest. Enough to run it ten years longer. By gollies, I thought he had more sense!"

Miss Violet stiffened.

"My father, Mr. Travers—" she began coldly. But Travers stopped her with an upraised hand.

"I know, Miss Violet," he apologized. "Shouldn't have said that. But he is in danger."

"Oh, Mr. Travers. He isn't— They won't— They haven't—"

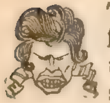
"I don't know what has happened," replied Travers, somewhat annoyed. "That's the thing I've got to find out. Right away. You stay right here, Miss Violet. Shouldn't leave the hotel if I were you. Understand? No telling what might happen. And I'll be back pretty quick—maybe with some information. And by the way, who had charge of your father's journey to Arzila?"

"Oh, a Spaniard, Juan, who came with us from Granada. He speaks Arabic—and he was wonderful in getting started. It was only about an hour from the time we landed before daddy started for Arzila. He just rushed things!"

"Rushed things is right," reflected Travers. "A Spaniard from Granada. Probably—"

But, for the girl's sake, he went no further with his voiced analysis of the situation.

II



TRAVERS had spoken truth when he said that his friend, to all intents and purposes, had bought a substantial interest in a real war, but he had done more than that; manifestly: he had purchased the enmity of powerful persons, powerful factions. Even Travers, with years of Moroccan experience, could only guess at the extent and variety of trouble which had been bought for a little printed slip of white paper with a few words scrawled upon it. Pacing the tiled terraces of the hotel, above the great marketplace, its hubbub inaudible to him in his preoccupation, Travers began listing, classifying, weighing in his mind these people and powers.

First, there was the vast radical group in Spain, the socialists, anarchists of degrees of intensity varying from the purely intellectual to the purely vicious, the great mass of peasantry always at point of revolt because of the drain upon them in blood and taxes, in short, every element in Spain which opposed the continuation of a Moroccan war for the protection of the mines owned by the de las Torres group, who opposed the continued sacrifice of youth in the guerilla warfare which had been waged for decades, who cursed the government—the king—who permitted this use of public power for private enterprise. Most of these, Travers knew, were harmless, and would remain so until the inevitable incident or man should arise to unite them in common cause.

Like every other people, they talked much and did little—they paid their taxes sullenly and with an oath, but they paid them; they complained bitterly against conscription of their youth and lamented with bitter lamentations at the casualty lists; but there had as yet been no outstanding incident, no great leader had arisen to convert sporadic local anger or uprising into a nationwide wave which should sweep the young king and his ministers from their places of power.

So it was not with these that for the present danger lay. Nor was it with the Socialists, the "moderates" who believed in education instead of dynamite and the pistol, who believed in letting the world know who they were and what they stood for.

There was, however, another group. But a little time had passed since Canalejos, the King's Prime Minister, had sprawled grotesquely upon a sidewalk at the report of an anarchist's pistol; but still less time had passed since a sunrise volley had ended the career of the socialist educator, Ferrer, beneath the walls of Montjoy and it did not need much wisdom to judge that those who threatened the Spanish throne because of the Little War would not remain idle while an American millionaire threw his gold into the hands of their enemies.

The American understood clearly why "Emperor" Lee should have been permitted to leave Spain in order to come to Morocco: once beyond the confines of Tangier city—where some semblance of law and order was maintained—there was little law save the survival of the strongest.

So much for the Spanish end of it. But this was by no means all. Other equally powerful elements were to be considered. If the Little War was unpopular in Spain, it was equally unpopular in Morocco, where it was looked upon as a war of aggression waged by their old enemies as a beginning of the conquest of the entire country. The Moors were not fools, and with some thousands of years of experience in repelling the invader behind them, they thoroughly realized what was going on.

Spanish troops had been in the Mar Chica district for generations—but the determination to drive them out was as strong in the heart of the grandson as it had been in that of his father's father.

If millions of American dollars were to be thrown into the scales against them, the matter, Travers was aware, would assume another shape; those Islamic forces, some visible, many hidden, which for centuries had operated for the protection of Morocco against predatory Europe, would know, and understand the menace, and would strike to eliminate it.

And "it" in the present instance emphatically was Emperor Lee. To Moorish patriots he would be anathema—a thing to kill.

That the Spanish radicals had taken the first step—and that promptly—seemed certain. Somewhere in the interior of Morocco Emperor Lee was in the hands of their emissary.

IN OPPOSITION to these powerful enemies, there was, Travers realized with a sinking of the heart, only one ally, the Spanish royalist party.

He could not call upon the American Consul, on his own government; it would seal Lee's death warrant. But ten millions of dollars—fifty millions of *pesetas*—was a sum great enough to command the attention of a Spanish grandee; yes, even of the King himself.

There would be, Travers foresaw, direct and immediate action of sorts from royalist circles, once Lee's predicament became known; or—he modified his thought—if it became known. But such action might be as fatal to "Emperor" Lee as the moves of the Anarchists themselves. He resolved to say nothing to the Spanish legation. All his native friends would be arrayed against him, too. For a pro-Moroccan cause he could have had for the asking—perhaps without—the amazing wisdom of the Black Magician, the daring bold heart of Mohamed Ali, the laughing outlaw, and of a score of powerful Moors whose hearts were with their country and Islam. But in this matter—Travers halted abruptly in his stride, as though he had stumbled over an obstacle.

He really had stumbled over an obstacle—the lightning-like revelation of the fact that he, too, was of one mind with the Black Magician and Mohamed Ali and his other native friends in this matter; that Emperor Lee's millions, his alliance with the Duke de las Torres, was an evil thing for Morocco.

Sudden and passionate love for this Sunset Land swept his veins, as it had done before; he saw clearly his own position: he could not, and would not, ignore the necessity to go to the aid of his friend, Emperor Lee; and, in direct antithesis to this, he could not, would not, struggle for the accomplishment of an end which, by aiding the Duke, would work incalculable harm to Morocco. Almost, he felt, it were better that Lee should die than that the Little War should be stimulated and extended. And yet, that he should leave his friend in the hands of enemies was unthinkable.

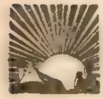
III

PUZZLED, perturbed, knowing that every moment counted vastly, yet realizing with equal clarity that purposeless action would accomplish nothing, Travers considered the nature of his first move. Manifestly it was to secure information with respect to the arrival and hurried departure of Emperor Lee and the servant called "Juan." But from whom could he secure it? Without doubt certain of his native friends knew what had taken place, through those secret channels by which they knew everything that occurred in Tangier.

The Black Magician would know; Hadj Hamed, the slipper-seller on the Siageen and the intimate of Mohamed Ali, would know; the ancient Green Saint, Sidi Labbas, who kept eternal watch at the Place of the Three Gates, would know—but would they tell him? Friends and aids in his previous successful effort to keep France and Germany from gaining the mining concession for Zemmur Providence, inevitably they would now be arrayed against him, even as he felt that he was arrayed against himself. How, and why, should he ask of them information which would be injurious to the land they loved, and upon which they kept jealous guard? Inquiries from him would savor of impudence: no, not that; they knew him too well, knew that he, also, was a sincere friend of their persecuted country. They would not misjudge him, but they would not aid him.

"And they would be in the right," he reflected aloud, sensing keenly his own rebellion against this latest business deal of his fellow American. "But who the devil else can tell me what I need to know? The marketplace? Bah! From six men I should hear six different tales—and none of them would be the truth."

He paced the terrace, his brow wrinkled in thought. At last he paused, and swung about; his native friends unquestionably would not help him; nevertheless he would take a walk through the town—perhaps some chance word would be of aid. But he smiled bleakly in derision of the thought: the Black Magician and Hadj Hamed and the Green Saint were not the sort to loose chance words upon the intrigue-laden air of Tangier.



THE sun touched the tops of the eucalyptus-crowned hills in the west, as he made his way through the *sok-el-kebir*. Upon the great market-place had fallen the hush of the day's end; venders of vegetables and fruit and charcoal had unhobbled their donkeys and one by one topped the hills toward their country homes; the squatting bread-women had risen fatly, stretched their numb legs, wrapped their white *haiks* more closely about them, and shuffled off to their dwellings; the little shops—some of them only an A-tent of gunny-sacks patched together, the more pretentious of box-boards or even flattened oil tins nailed together—stood with shut eyes; the time of the *moghreb* prayer was at hand for the Faithful. As he passed along the crudely cobbled street which led to the Place of the Three Gates, Travers heard the distant tremolo of the *mueddin* on the mosque-tower summoning Islám to turn its face toward the east and its spirit toward its God.

At the Place of the Three Gates Travers paused. In a corner of a horseshoe gate a great green figure—green of voluminous garments, green of vast turban—knelt upon a green prayer rug and humbled his long white beard to the earth, as his lips proclaimed the Oneness of Allah.

"'*A'la ilaha, il 'la a'alah, Mohamed er-raisu 'il allah.* There is no god but Allah and Mohamed in his prophet."

Travers waited at a little distance until the ancient holy man had finished adoration of his Supreme Being, had gained his feet, slowly and, with the stiff-jointed motions of the old, had folded his prayer rug and grasped the great iron-tipped staff which had been leaning against the wall; then he spoke a word of greeting.

The green-turbaned head turned toward him, the old and watery blue eyes looked from the seamed-and-weathered face into his—but for a space there was no recognition; it seemed that the soul of Sidi Labbas was coming back from distant places not of earth.

Then the tired old eyes smiled greeting, and leaning upon his giant staff like a patriarch of old, Sidi Labbas held out a cool, withered hand to the American.

Travers felt a release of the tension within him, realized that he had dreaded to meet a look of enmity in the beneficent face of the kindly old *marabout* who spent his life helping his fellow men bear the mental and physical pains which are the price of human existence—touching raw ulcers with some weird powder which dried them up, telling mothers what to do for the eyes of babies infected by fly-bites, giving a little powdered rhinoceros horn to the wives, young and old, who desired to present their lords with men-children, spitting upon an aching tooth to stop the pain; and for the mentally sick administering common sense in large doses, cunningly wrapped up in proverbs and maxims, hoary with age, or newly-invented for the occasion, or in flaming excerpts from El Koran.

"An enemy may cost us much, but who can foretell what one must pay for a friend!"

"But in the name of friendship, giving can not be measured," replied Travers, using the holy man's own weapon of proverbial philosophy. "And that is why, my friend—" he hurried on, stressing a little the word—"I have come to you."

A heavily-laden burro passed by at a trot, urged onward by a pointed stick in the hands of the brown countryman who sat atop the flat pack-saddle, his bare legs beating a tattoo upon the donkey's ribs, and jabbing the stick into the little beast's neck.

Sidi Labbas followed the moving picture with his eyes.

"So and thus," he observed with a faint flicker of mirth in his wrinkled face, "so and thus does Allah urge onward those who seek trouble in the name of friendship." And, after a little space of silence— "So you have come to me in the name of our friendship, seeking aid for another friend. Thus the chain is forged. Never does one make a single new friendship; always the gaining of a new friend means the acquisition of all of his friends. And to such a business there is no end. Be not offended *sahibi de ali*—for I am your friend—but somewhere the chain must be broken. You yourself—" the old eyes, surprisingly keen now, bored into Travers'—"Yes, you yourself now regret that you are a friend of the rich American."

"No—" Travers objected, "I regret that he has undertaken a thing which I dislike, and fear."

"So be it," assented the ancient, stroking his beard. "And so the price you must pay for calling him *sahibi* is—sacrifice of other friendships?"

Travers made an impatient gesture of denial.

"No," he said. "I had hoped that there could be found a way—that you, in the wisdom of your years, might show me a road, whereby I could pay my debt of friendship to him, without sacrificing those things which I hold equally dear."

"Youth said to Age, 'I desire to travel two roads at the same time; show me the way,' " chanted the Saint. "But even I, who have nearly thrice your years, do not know how the thing may be done. There is but one road, the road that Allah has set one's feet upon, and no man may have another."

"True, I believe," agreed Travers. "But, which road is it ordained that I shall take?"

"That," replied Sidi Labbas, "is not yet revealed."

He smiled a little: not for nothing had he spent half a hundred years answering the questions of Islám.

"Which," observed Travers, "leaves us just where we were. Now let us talk occident instead of orient. Will you help me to find my American friend? Will you tell me what road he took? Will you aid me against his enemies?"

For a moment Sidi Labbas did not answer. Then, his words short and sharp:

"Good. We will talk occident. Can you promise that your friend will discontinue his connection with the Spaniard if he should escape?"

"I can not promise," replied Travers without hesitation. He knew Emperor Lee, thoroughly knew the stubbornness of that financier once he had decided upon a course of action.

"Do you even think that he might do so—out of gratitude, perhaps?"

Again Travers was forced to answer in the negative.

"I fear not. He is a man of strength, strength sometimes uncontrolled."

Sidi Labbas shook his head slowly.

"Then," he said, "he must use that strength for his own rescue. Not for your friendship with him—not even for my own best friend—not for my own life—would I aid in turning that strength against my country."

Travers read the old lined face with care. It did not look like an ancient vellum now, scrawled with arabesques, but like granite seamed by centuries of storm, scratched by the passage of glaciers. And in the blue eyes was the cold of ice itself. He nodded his head in acceptance of the old man's verdict, and held out his hand.

"I do not know," he said, "what I shall do. I seek the road which it is ordained I must take. But at least let me still leave a friend upon it, at the Place of the Three Gates."

The hand of kindliness wiped the hardness from the holy one's face. He took the proffered hand in his own.

"Go with Allah," he said. "I shall remain your friend—until you injure my country. I think that you will not do so. Remember 'We fear lest some adversity befall us, but it is easy for Allah to give victory.' "

DEPRESSED of spirit, Travers continued on between the gates. But now he had abandoned his intention of calling upon Habib, the Black Magician, Master of the Unnumbered *Djinnoon:* if the eyes of Sidi Labbas, the most venerable and kindly and gentle of all his native friends, grew cold at thought of Emperor Lee—Travers shrugged in completion of his thought. Before his inner eye rose the massive black face of the Master of the *Djinnoon*, hard as ebony, with tiger eyes shooting little flames which took away a man's senses, unless he was very, very careful and held tightly on to something real with his mind.

And following it came the face of Mohamed Ali, that laughing Cavalier of the wild Anghera hills who, a political outlaw, openly derided the force and majesty of the Sultan, boldly and with vast skill brought evil days to his enemies, thumbed his nose at the European Powers—yet guarded his country's welfare with a great knowledge, a keen mind, and sure, swift action. Valiant, invaluable allies only a few weeks ago; now, without much doubt, the most dangerous of enemies.

As the American turned through the gate of the main street, a figure in the conventional garb of the Moroccan Jew, black gabardeen and black skull-cap, approached him from a secluded corner, and brought him out of his mental abstraction by a touch upon his sleeve. Travers looked down upon a hunch-backed form whose cap came only a little higher than his elbow, into a stubble-bearded face, pasty-white beneath the hairs, with hooked nose, thick lips and small black eyes set, Travers felt as he looked into them, unusually close together. The gabardeen was spotted with grease and dirt, and the hand which grasped the American's coat sleeve was no cleaner than the garment of its owner. With a shrug of repugnance Travers drew away from the clutching fingers.

"I desire to buy nothing—nor have I alms to give," he snapped in Arabic. A native policeman came stamping along in his ridiculous red jacket, yellow breeches and heavy brogans. "Go, or I will have this man drive you away."

"Do not so, Sidi," replied the Jew, in Arabic; then he switched abruptly to the Spanish tongue. "Because, Señor Travers, I have a message for you." Travers started and opened his eyes in surprize, and a little smile crossed the face of the *Judio*. "Your friend is being taken to Arzila by Benito Bravo, the Anarchist, and in Arzila lives his friend, Miguel Belarbi. That is all. *Adios*, Señor."

It was now Travers' turn to stretch forth a detaining hand, but his action came too late. Swiftly the hunch-backed Jew stepped backward, turned down a little side street, and entered a house. Travers knocked heartily upon the heavy oak door, but in vain; in no place more than in Morocco does a door cut one off from what is beyond it.

IV

IN mid-afternoon of the following day a jaded Travers rode a jaded horse through the gateway in the thirty-foot thickness of the ancient city wall of Arzila—wall which once enclosed a busy city of a hundred thousand people, now encircling acres of ruins among which a thousand souls only carried on the business of life.

On previous visits Travers had thought of what a stronghold it would make for an outlaw gang. The walls were three-score feet in height, honeycombed with tunnels and secret chambers, most of them sealed up and long forgotten; the abandoned and ruined buildings of the ancient town would afford safe hiding place for a small army. Half the population were Jews in a state of semi-slavery and entire subjugation; in Tangier they were comparatively free, but here still they must carry their slippers in their hands while passing a mosque, could wear no color save black, nor any jewelry, and outside the *mellah*—the segregated and walled Jewish quarter wherein they were locked each night to protect them and their women from the evil-minded among the Moorish citizens—they walked at their own risk in fear and trembling servility. Yet Arzilan Jews were better off than those of some other Moroccan towns; they at least could no longer be killed for sport—without the payment of a substantial fine.

Riding with Travers as his sole companion was one Mustapha, a youth whose services the American had been glad to obtain. For Mustapha was cousin to Mohamed Ali, the outlaw, and confidant of one Hadj Hamed—a merchant whom Travers had reason to suspect of being not only the "eye" of Mohamed Ali in Tangier, but also to have intimate connection with that individual or brotherhood whispered of in the market-places as the "Hand of Allah." Travers had offered Mustapha much silver coin to accompany him—and he was well aware that the youth had consented only after Hadj Hamed had given his consent. That was well, however, because Travers desired that all his actions should be known to certain people. Through Hadj Hamed, he was assured, Mohamed Ali and the Black Magician and the Green Saint, and various other powerful natives, would be informed. At whatever cost to Emperor Lee, Travers felt keenly the necessity that in his every action toward the rescue of his friend, he himself must try to keep above any suspicion that he was working against the interests of Morocco.

THE night had been a sleepless one—a night filled with thoughts of the hunch-backed Jew and his message—was it a trap only?—of the Scylla and Charybdis between which he found himself; what he felt for Lee upon one hand, upon the other what he felt for his native friends and for Morocco. But from the hours of kaleidoscopic thought, of wide-awakeness and of half sleep, had come a glimmer of light, illuminating the road he should follow, although but a little way; he was in duty bound to go to the aid of Emperor Lee, to help him, if possible, to escape from his personal peril. But there his connection with Lee must end, his friendship even. For beyond that Travers could only see that he must oppose his countryman at every step. Lee must not die—but neither must he be permitted to carry out his plans with the Duke de las Torres. Having reached this decision, Travers had smiled wryly into the darkness of his bedroom.

"To keep him from being killed will be just as easy as to keep him from carrying out his plans if he isn't killed. By gollies, I have sure got myself into one beautiful mess." Then, after a few more tossings and turnings, he had gone to sleep.

Dawn had found him awake, and sunrise saw him preparing for the road. It had startled him a little to find the youth Mustapha squatting at a corner of the *fonda*, smoking cigarettes, a picture of patience and content, as though there remained nothing to be done in this world except to await the sound of Gabriel's trumpet. At once it came to him that Mustapha had him under surveillance, no doubt at the orders of Hadj Hamed. And with the next thought his decision was made—he would take Mustapha with him, thus making it easy for his actions to be observed—and perhaps, he saw dimly, opening a way out of his predicament in the now exceedingly hazy future.

Mustapha had come at his call, rising lazily, throwing away his half-smoked cigarette, for he was a polite youth, and smiling ingenuously.

"My friend Hadj Hamed ordered you to watch me," said Travers, without preliminaries, and in level voice. "That is well. But now go you to Hadj Hamed and say that I desire that you ride with me. I will pay you what is proper—and a little more. And tell Hadj Hamed, also, that I ride to Arzila—to try to save the life of my friend.'

Neither affirming nor denying, neither approving nor disapproving, Mustapha had nodded understanding of Travers' commands, had turned upon slippered heels, and had gone. By the time Travers had finished his preparations he was back, mounted this time, upon a good horse. As he rode up he saluted Travers.

"I am ready, Sidi," he said; that was all, except for a flicker of amusement in his dark eyes. Mustapha, youthful friend of Hadj Hamed and cousin to the famous outlaw, Mohamed Ali, had a sense of humor, and considerable respect for men who knew what they wanted. The smile in his eyes was not at the American but was caused by what Hadj Hamed had said.

"*Y'allah teef!*" that astute gentleman had murmured. "The subtle one! Assuredly this American is clever although it is with the occidental directness to which we are not much accustomed! Go with him and with Allah. He must be opposed in some things but not in this. And I thank Allah that he asked that you accompany him, instead of asking *me* to do so! Perhaps—" He grinned in his thick beard—"Perhaps I should have done so, had he asked."

Thus with Mustapha at his heels, and a muleteer with pack animals straggling behind, Travers had ridden into the Arzila of the ancient Romans, seeking the house of Miguel Belarbi.

AND now chance stepped in. Assuredly there was no obvious connection between a herd of pigs and the fate of Emperor Lee, powerful president of the All-American Metals Corporation. Every religion has expressed, somewhere in its records, a vast astonishment at the humble instruments which the gods use in accomplishing their purposes—a fact which, perhaps should serve to convince us that in the eyes of the Omniscient and Omnipotent there is not the vast difference which mortals observe between things—between, for example, Emperor Lee and the sick pigs of Henry Sumpson, a missionary of the Christian faith trying to keep body and soul together in a Moslem land, and to make at least one convert before he should entirely starve to death on the kind letters and sweet hopes sent him with brotherly regularity by a foreign missionary society in Kansas.

Henry Sumpson was no immaculate archangel wielding the flaming sword of truth, but a child, whose head was half filled with brains and half with religious zeal which sometimes takes the place of intelligence because of its earnestness—a shabby, dirty man who smelled to high heaven from the pigs by which, with the occasional aid of some infidel Moslem neighbor, he had thus far managed to keep from starving to death.

Upon this summer day Henry Sumpson was in a panic because of a sickness which had set upon his pigs, for this constituted a very real threat against his own welfare. While he could not have given the smallest of his swine to the poorest wretch of a Jew or Moslem, there was in Tangier a considerable colony of Europeans who, with the coming of cool weather each year, were glad to buy fresh pork; and by this annual sale, together with such vegetables as he could raise, Henry Sumpson was enabled to eat frugally and preach the Word zealously until the next year.

Wherefore, as the loss of his stock, the missing for one year of his only material revenue, meant unqualified disaster, Henry Sumpson had gone forth hurriedly from his little plot of land outside Arzila in search of advice. Through the streets of Arzila he had wandered asking acquaintances and strangers about the maladies which affect pigs, and so simple minded was he that it was not until his fiftieth rebuke—an amazed head-shake, a cold stare, or coarse laughter—that he suddenly realized the curse which lay upon swine in the eyes of both Jews and Moslems, that in all the world he could find no place which knew less, and cared less, about pigs. And not a single Christian dwelt in the town! At this thought Henry Sumpson had turned wearily back toward the gate; he would have to mount his decrepit old mule and ride the fifty miles to Tangier. But at the gate as he stepped aside to let two riders pass, he saw, as one sees a miracle, that the foremost rider was neither Moor nor Jew: and as his eyes noted the heavy stock saddle, he guessed that Divine Providence, in its mercy, had sent an American to Arzila—to save his pigs.

Travers drew rein sharply at the sound of his own tongue, and studied the figure which had approached and stood grasping a stirrup-strap.

"You are an American? Yes? I see you are. So am I—perhaps you've heard of me—Henry Sumpson, the missionary?" There was in the voice both pride and deference.

Travers nodded. He had heard of the man—as an example of the results of a certain kind of foreign missionary work in the States.

"I'm Travers," he said.

"Oh yes; I know now. The man who got the Zemmur concession. Yes, yes." He took a deep breath, and blurted: "Mr. Travers, I'm—I'm in trouble."

Travers looked away, embarrassed by the sight of the dirty clothes, the pale, splotched, unclean face, the ancient broken straw hat through which wisps of graying hair protruded, the prominent, unblinking eyes.

"Yes, sir, Mr. Travers, I'm in a heap o' trouble, and more comin', I reckon. Don't rightly know how I'm goin' to find enough to eat, unless—unless—" He stopped to swallow something which had risen to clog his speech. Quick sympathy swept Travers, and with a swift movement he drew his bill-fold and plunged his fingers in among the crisp notes it held.

"You know, old man," he said, smiling, by an effort, into the blue eyes— "You know, I've had it in mind for a long time to help along with this work of yours. By gollies, it's a rotten hard job you've got—I know. And so—here—just take this, from a well-wisher for the good work."

He had lied sincerely and well, and was therefore surprized when, after one long hungry look at the fifty-dollar note, the missionary shook his head and stammered.

"No—no! Thanks! Thanks so much, but—but I couldn't. It's not that. "It's it's—oh, Mr. Travers, do you know anything about pigs?" He enunciated the last word as though the pig were a rare species of mammal.

Travers wanted to laugh, but the tragic face of the little man changed that desire to another, the wish to help this immature creature, who should have been serving sugar and flour and molasses to the matrons of Smithville or Jonesburg, instead of carrying the torch of Christianity among the infidels of fanatical Morocco.

"I," answered Travers, seriously, "was raised on a farm."

"Then—then you can tell me what to do!" cried Henry Sumpson joyously. "My pigs are sick—an' I'm scared they're goin' to die. An' I don't know what to do. What shall I do?"

"That," Travers made answer, "depends upon what ails them. And that, in turn, requires that I see them. Where do you live?"

The little missionary led through the gateway and pointed towards a hill perhaps a quarter of a mile away.

"Behind that hill," he said, indicating the rise with a grimy forefinger.

"Very well," said Travers. "I'll ride over." Then he recalled the banknote in his hand. "On one condition," he added. As Henry Sumpson looked at him for enlightenment he proffered the note, and explained:

"On the condition that you take this—to help along your work."

"For our cause—yes, and thank you," agreed the missionary, and took the bill with hands that trembled. It was almost as much as he had to live on for all the year.

"Ride, then, with Mustapha," commanded Travers.

Thus it came about that Fate led Henry Sumpson to the city gate of Arzila at just the right moment—and that Travers, turning back along the trail to minister to sick pigs, passed a cowled, brown countryman, riding a mule laden with charcoal, whose face, smutty and bandaged as to one eye, caused him to turn in his saddle to stare with puzzled eyes at the countryman's broad back.

WHILE Travers served as Physician-in-Ordinary to His Majesty Pig—finding his malady to be not necessarily fatal—and listened to tales concerning the house of Miguel Belarbi and its half-Spanish half-Moorish owner, Emperor Lee paced defiantly five steps and turn at right angles, five steps and another ninety degree turn, repeat, and repeat again, and begin over. He would have omitted the turns had it been possible, but at the end of each quintet of paces his face came up against a very solid and unfriendly stone wall. Emperor Lee was a prisoner in a ten-foot square dungeon—somewhere in Arzila. The little light which managed to enter through a high, tiny and iron-barred window, seeming, by the act of squeezing through to lose much of its vigor, illuminated one side of the room only. But it would have needed only a brief glance, even in poorer light than this, to have judged that the big, bearded American was in such a state of anger as comes but seldom to even a man of high blood pressure and choleric disposition.

Even one miraculously able to see into the Emperor's mind, would have found it difficult to perceive just what matter was the chief cause of his anger. Strangely enough, it was neither the fact that he was a prisoner in a semi-civilized country, nor that he had manifestly been betrayed by the Spanish servant in whose hands he had placed himself. No; the thing which now caused him to see red was the knowledge that he had not really been as all-wise as he had believed. Those who know, by experience, the depth of self-anger possible, will understand; those who do not, have yet to learn that there is subjective anger which is infinitely greater than one can experience towards any person or object, however hateful. Which is why many people commit suicide who would never dream of murder. And it may be said also that such self-anger is experienced only by the just-minded, who realize their own responsibilities, never by those who by some dim process of rationalizing always place the blame upon others.

Emperor Lee had been well warned by a friend in Gibraltar, who knew both Spain and Morocco as well as he knew his own hat. But in his accustomedness to power, in his ignorance of certain matters, Lee had only ridiculed his fears, and had cursed all Socialists and Anarchists as a nuisance—not as a menace.

THE sound of a bolt rasping in its sockets brought him back to the Present. The oak door swung open and two men entered, pistols in hand. The last to enter closed the door. Emperor Lee scowled blackly at his visitors, the dark-faced Spaniard, his erstwhile guide, and the fellow in Moorish garments, who bore a deep white scar from one corner of his bearded lips to the point of the chin, a scar which drew his pock-marked face into a perpetual snarl. "Scar-lip" he was called by those who were not his friends—and these were many. But his companion gave him his right name as he now said, with a grin which failed to contain humor:

"Our big bear seems to be in a temper, eh, Miguel, *amigo?* Thus I have seen them often among the mountains of Spain—big and brown and angry, but very helpless."

"To one who knows where to shoot, Benito," agreed Scar-lip.

"Ah yes," assented the Spaniard easily. "But I know, having killed many such, and even with a less powerful weapon than this." He waved the pistol a little.

"Shoot and be —— to you," said Emperor Lee, noting the unfastened door behind them. He stepped forward; cowardice was not in him. "Why don't you shoot, you pair of cheap crooks? If you don't I'm going to take those guns away from you and make you eat 'em."

But if there was no yellow in the American, there was no more in the Spaniard. Smiling, he commanded softly, "Miguel, *cerra la puerta.*" At his command Miguel turned and went outside; the door was closed tightly and the bolts sent home.

Benito grinned now, with a little humor, into Lee's face.

"Loud words," he observed, "usually conceal an intention. I think you imagined you could gain the door. Wherefore—" he shrugged. "And now, Señor Big Bear, the little Benito is locked in with you—must he try his teeth upon this most excellent product of an American gunsmith?" Abruptly the smile faded and the face twitched. "Enough of joking, American! I could put ten bullets into your heart before you could cross the room. Now give heed: perhaps I shall not kill you after all, as I have been commanded to do."

Unless he be a complete fool an unarmed man does not attack such a face as Benito's now was, when it looks at him over a pistol. And Benito's words had caused a new thought to flash into the American's mind. Perhaps, after all, he reflected, this was nothing so serious as a movement of the Spanish radicals. Benito's next words both denied and confirmed his thought.

"I shall speak clearly, American," he said, "because I have no fear of you. My orders —and they come from those who presently shall rule Spain—are to kill you. If I do not kill you, my own life will be condemned. But—" He paused and looked keenly into the American's eyes—"But that, I have decided, is a risk worth taking for—" he spaced his words—"for—the—right—price."

"So you would sell out your cause to me—for the right price, eh?" There was insult in Lee's voice, but Benito waved it aside.

"Our cause is to secure for every one some of the wealth now held by the few. If I can get my share of it now—well, then, *Madre de dios!* am I not furthering the cause just that much?"

Lee searched the Spaniard's face for trace of humor. None showed, yet his words had held it.

"Your price?" he demanded then.

"One million dollars," answered the Spaniard without hesitation. "One-tenth, only, of what you would pay the Duke de las Torres. Thus—" the humor showed now, viciously cynical, "—thus I will be your benefactor to the extent of nine millions."

"But I shall pay the Duke just the same," Lee corrected him. "You can't scare me out of a thing this way."

Benito bowed slightly in assent.

"As you like about that, of course, Señor," he said. "That will not be—as you say in English—my funeral. It will, no doubt, be yours. But now—one million dollars, part in gold, the remainder in French bank notes."

"But how can I pay that—here?"

"It is very easy. You will send a message to your Paris bankers, who will send the money very speedily, by boat from Marseilles. It will come to Tangier to your daughter, and she will deliver it as you will command. Do not stare! Very easily, under the noses of all official and unofficial Tangier, I could go there, get the gold, and take it away, without interference. Even," he added, with a significant look, "even though your word was without value. Although that would be most unfortunate! And now—time passes; say whether it is to be as I suggest—or this." He waved the automatic.

"I am no fool," said Lee, with a sincerity he did not feel. "My life is worth a million—to me, at least. I accept your terms—with one condition."

"And that?" inquired Benito softly.

"That my word be considered to be without value," explained Lee. "I will pay you your price for my liberty—but I will make no promise of any sort, beyond that. In short, what I must do I will do under compulsion."

"That," answered Benito, "is perfectly clear—and perfectly satisfactory. I shall go now, and bring from your baggage the little red code book which you use, in order that you may prepare a message to your bankers."

VI

IN ONE of the three rooms of the squat stone and plaster house wherein existed Henry Sumpson—a room thoroughly scrubbed and aired for the first time since its construction—Travers worked by the light of a tall flickering candle before a glass which once had been a mirror, but which now was little more than a warped walnut frame enclosing a surface of glass behind which seemed to be a relief map showing continents and islands, rivers and lakes, with canals radiating in all directions. Only a grotesque semblance of a face was reflected by it, such a face as Futurist, or perhaps Concentrist, artists are apt to vision. Yet, being the only mirror at hand, it had to serve.

James J. Travers, was making another man of himself, now and then smiling grimly at his impossible reflection as he did so. Already he had cut his hair very short and shaved it off around the edges—thanking Allah sincerely for the invention of the safety razor—so that none would show beneath a fez. And now, commenting to himself, he donned the wearing apparel suitable for a well-to-do Moor.

"It's probably a fool stunt," he told himself, as he slid into the baggy breeches of pale blue broadcloth, and tied their broad drawstring about his waist. "But what else to do? What else to do? Wouldn't try it in the day-time, by gollies! Got more brains than that!"

He drew on long stockings and slipped his feet into a pair of yellow, heelless slippers, curling his toes as he took a few experimental steps to make sure he had not forgotten how to bend them at just the right moment to keep the slippers on his feet.

"Probably won't have to talk to anybody—much," he reflected. "Prayers are over, so I won't get caught that way." He revisited the mirror. "Ought to have a little more beard and mustache," he told his reflection—and then remembered that charcoal would to the business. Silken embroidered vest went on over silken shirt, and over that a heavy white *sulham*, a hooded cloak falling to his ankles.

"Old Sleuth had nothing on me!" he commented at last, with a grin which split fifty ways in the mirror, as he donned fez and turban. "And now for the charcoal!"

He opened the door of his room and called to the missionary, and called again. But no answer in English came—only a native boy who stared with amazed brown eyes at the cloaked figure in the doorway. Travers repressed his annoyance—it was not on his program to have his masquerade known to all Arzila—and in swift, lurid Arabic desired to know who the boy was, where he came from, and what he was doing. But the boy appeared to be rather less than a half-wit, and could only stare and say that the missionary would return soon.

"Daba ja, daba ja, daba ja," he repeated, until at last Travers roared an ejaculation which rendered him speechless and openmouthed.

"Bring charcoal then, and at once," he commanded, and the youth fled, to return with running feet, bearing half a gunnysack of charcoal, which he deposited at Travers' feet.

Repressing a desire to shout, Travers tossed the boy a coin and returned to the business of adding seven days' growth of beard and mustache in as many minutes—a necessity because of the fact that no Moor of his age is smooth-shaven.

He had just finished this bit of camouflage when there came a timid tap upon his door.

"Who is it?" he asked, this time in Arabic, and was relieved when the mild, colorless voice of Henry Sumpson answered him.

AT HIS invitation the missionary entered. As he had purchased the native garments for his fellow-American, he was not amazed at the metamorphosis which had taken place within the cocoon-like room. Travers, however, had made no confidant of him; he realized the mental limitations, and consequent lack of discretion, of the man. True, he had found it necessary to use the missionary's services in the purchase of the garments; to have bought them himself would have attracted the attention of the entire town, and would have created as many suspicions as comments. At his request Henry Sumpson had bought them in widely separated shops, thus reducing to the minumum any tendency toward inquiry.

From the missionary, also, Travers had inquired concerning the position of the house of Miguel Belarbi. But Henry Sumpson's knowledge as to its location was extremely hazy. Vocal directions failed utterly; attempts were made with diagrams of the town's streets, but after three separate and distinct positions for the house had been indicated by the missionary, Travers had given it up as a bad job. All he had gained was the knowledge that probably the house he sought stood somewhere within a radius of a hundred yards from the mosque of Sidi Cassim. In view of the fact that there were probably five hundred houses within this area, clustered together like the units in a hornet's nest, the walls of one serving as walls for four others, Travers was little benefitted by his fellow-countryman. Travers had not wished to ask his servant, Mustapha, concerning this house. It was all right to bring Mustapha with him from Tangier in order that his native friends might be assured—but at the proper time only—that his acts were not intended to be harmful to their interests, but he did not propose, at this moment, either to take Mustapha into his confidence, nor, if he could help it, to let Mustapha know what he was doing. He had therefore, during the afternoon, gladly given the boy permission to spend the night with a cousin in the city, telling him that he would rest in the house of the missionary until the following morning, when they would begin their inquiries. He was not at all certain that Mustapha had believed this, any more than he was certain that Mustapha desired to visit a dearly beloved cousin; but so long as Mustapha had business of his own, the situation was quite to Travers' satisfaction.

The American had been forced into the only course open to him, a course of which his head did not approve in the least. There are many people who believe that almost any one who speaks Arabic fluently may don Mohammedan dress and travel undetected among the Moslems. And there are quite a number of untruthful gentlemen who claim, mostly for publication purposes, to have accomplished this feat. But the fact is that those who have actually done so could be counted upon his fingers, by a one-armed man.

Any one of average intelligence may, in the course of a year in an Arabic-speaking country, pick up the few hundred words necessary for the exigencies of life; any fool can learn to wear native garments, including the heelless slippers; but there is as much difference between such childish masquerade and the real thing as there is between the size of this our earth and Betelguese. As well say that a Turk who has spent five or ten or twenty-five years in this country could pass among a gathering of college professors as a *Mayflower* descendent. Once in a generation or two a man is born who can change himself and his nationality, a great actor as well as a profound scholar and marvelous psychologist—then we get a Sir Richard Burton.

All of this Travers knew, and only the fact that he was literally to work in the dark, so far as possible to avoid contact with the natives, permitted him to adopt Moorish attire. For ordinary intercourse his Arabic was perfect—but it would not have served him a score of words at prayer, where every least inflection, every nuance, has its significance; it would serve for the casual greeting in the unlighted street, the commonplace inquiry or answer among the ignorant natives whom he was apt to encounter on their way to and from the little coffee-houses which are their night clubs.

Completing his preparations by slipping an automatic pistol into the holster beneath his left arm, Travers turned to the missionary with a question about pigs on his lips, and became suddenly aware of a change in the little man's face. He had, however, little time to reflect upon this, for Henry Sumpson approached him on tiptoe, put one hand upon his shoulder and, with a quick glance about the room, leaned forward to whisper:

"Now I know just where the house of Miguel Belarbi is."

Indulgently Travers smiled and stepped backward: the odor of pigs was still strong in the land.

"Fine!" he exclaimed. "Fine! But how did you learn?"

Again before answering the little man searched the room with his eyes.

"I've been there," he whispered.

It might have been a shout, so far as its effects upon Travers were concerned.

"You have been there!" he exclaimed. "You have been there?"

Henry Sumpson nodded.

"But I'm not to tell anybody," and again he looked about the room with fear in his eyes, before he smiled like a naughty boy who has stolen jam.

FOR a space Travers considered the missionary in silence, speculating upon a number of things. Had the little man taken upon himself to make inquiries for his benefactor? Or had his, Travers', presence in the house of the missionary reached the ears of his enemies? Or was there some other explanation—in case the little man was not merely dreaming? Travers realized keenly that with the missionary he would have to be as cautious as with a child. Then the words "but I'm not to tell anybody," echoed in his ears with sinister meaning. Assuredly they did not indicate that his fellow-countryman had sought information of his own accord.

"That," he observed quietly, "is interesting. Is Miguel about to become a convert?"

"Oh, it wasn't that," answered Henry Sumpson simply. "You see—but I wasn't to tell anybody." He paused in thought for a moment, then his face brightened with child-like relief. "But I didn't promise I wouldn't: they just ordered me not to. An' as I'll have to go away, I thought—" He looked ingenuously into Travers' eyes, hesitated, then, "I thought if my pigs got sick again maybe you'd look after 'em for me."

Travers was greatly tempted to laugh, but the seriousness in the missionary's pale blue eyes, and the implication of his words, swiftly killed the impulse.

"Yes," Travers told him, "if your pigs get sick again I will take care of them, if I'm here. But I think perhaps you had better tell me all about this, so that—so that I will know—hm!—what it's all about." He motioned his host to a chair and seated himself.

"Now shoot," he said.

"Well, you see it's like this, Mr. Travers," said the missionary. "After I'd bought them things for you 'n' you was here in your room, I was lookin' at that white shoat that was so sick—I was standin' there by the sty, sort o' thankin' God that He's sent you along to help me—an' a native boy come up to me and said his master wanted to make a gift to the cause 'n' that I must come with him right now to get it. It's happened once or twice—I don't understand exac'ly—that some kind-hearted Moor gave me a little money. Mebbe it's because I try to take care of the poor Moorish children when they get sick 'n' their parents don't know what to do for 'em. An' perhaps it's just because now an' then one of 'em sees the truth in our gospel. So I washed my hands and went with the Moorish boy to a big house that was right where I thought the house of Miguel Belarbi was, 'n' so I asked him if this wasn't the house of Miguel Belarbi, 'n' he said it was. It was just where I thought it was the second time, you remember, when we drew the map—" Travers interrupted him with a nod of acquiescence: there were things more important for the moment than the precise location of the house of Belarbi.

"What happened then?" he asked.

"Then—why then we went inside and a man—he wasn't Miguel Belarbi, but somebody I don't know—a Spaniard—talked to me 'n' said he wanted me to go to Tangier with 'im tonight 'n' that he'd pay me for my time, an' he gave me—" The missionary slid a hand into his pants' pocket and brought out a yellow-backed bank note—"He gave me this for the cause."

At sight of the bank note Travers gasped. American twenty-dollar bills are as scarce in Arzila as a Mohammedan in a Christian heaven. In the first place a twenty-dollar gold certificate will buy all the money in the world, so far as Arzila in general is concerned. And yet it is no money at all; one may easily starve to death with one—a pint of copper coins is sometimes worth more than a thousand-dollar bill. There was only one reasonable supposition. A thousand chances to one that this bank note had come from the purse of Emperor Lee. The tip given him by the hunch-backed Jew at the Place of the Three Gates in Tangier had, then, been reliable: Emperor Lee was in Arzila, or at least had been there. Travers now felt that he had hold of at least one strand of the tangle. And Henry Sumpson was to go to Tangier with this man who donated Emperor Lee's bank notes to an opposing cause! He repressed the impetuous questions which rose to his lips. It would not do to startle this child-like promulgator of the gospel, nor to let him suspect that perhaps he was a puppet in a dangerous game.

"Well, that's fine, by gollies!" Travers told him. "If this keeps on you won't have to worry whether your pigs are sick or not.

And—and why does he want you to go to Tangier?"

"Oh, I don't want my pigs to die, anyhow," said the little man. "You see—this—" he looked with shining eyes upon the bank note in his hand—"this and the big one you gave me are for the cause, an' not for me. With them I c'n get more medicines 'n' things for the native children an'—an'—I want to make a little hospital—just a little house where I c'n take care of some of 'em when I get—when I can. You see—" In sudden panic his eyes sought those of Travers for reassurance, and found it. "You see, here it isn't only a question of preachin' the gospel—but of 'sufferin' the little children'—an' so many of 'em die!"

A sudden picture flashed through Travers' mind—a picture which he and Emperor Lee could make come true, and strangely enough the presence of the little inefficient man before him seened to change, to demand a new dignity and stature; a robe of white fell about him as he sat and at his knees stood ragged children listening, with wide eyes, to his voice. And somehow to Travers' ears came a distant murmur, "And the last shall be first and the first shall be last." With an effort he drew himself back to realities.

"And so," he said, "you are going to Tangier with this man tonight?"

Henry Sumpson nodded agreement.

"Yes, he's got some business with the American Consul, an' a message to take to the Consul from a friend o' his, an' he wants me to go with him as interpreter."

"I see," said Travers. "I see. Did he happen to say who this friend of his was?"

"No," answered the missionary, "he didn't. And I don't know his name, either; except I heard somebody call him Benito."

Travers grunted. Benito! Benito Bravo, of course!

"When will you go? What time?" he asked.

At the question the little man came to himself with a start.

"My gracious!" he exclaimed. "It won't be long now before I've got to go. I must—I've got to get ready. He'll be waitin' for me."

"Is he going to stop for you?"

"No," answered Henry Sumpson. "He's goin' to wait for me at the house of Miguel Belarbi—an' I must hurry." Making a funny little bow he took his departure, leaving Travers thinking at the rate of a mile a minute. That he was on the trail of Emperor Lee he had not the slightest doubt. That Henry Sumpson was being used as a pawn by those who held Lee captive was certain. But why was Benito Bravo riding with the missionary to Tangier? And what was the message? These were questions which Travers felt demanded as prompt an answer as could be obtained.

VII

DARKNESS had come, and in accordance with his instructions, Henry Sumpson, having notified a servant of his arrival, sat upon a bench in the patio of Miguel Belarbi's house, speculating upon the affairs which had arisen in his life within the past few hours, seeing in them clearly the hand of an all-wise and all-protecting Providence.

Fortunately for him, he could neither hear nor see what had passed and what was passing now in a room not a dozen feet from his own back.

In this room—a windowless cube hung with rich draperies and carpets and, instead of chairs, luxurious cushions upon the floor—Miguel Belarbi and Benito Bravo were bidding each other an amused farewell. The master of the house, wearing the indoor robe of the well-to-do Moor—a velvet, silken embroidered, knee-length, close fitting garment without sleeves—squatted upon a magnificently worked cushion and inhaled the smoke of an English cigarette, while his malicious black eyes laughed cynically from beneath the heavy brows which overhung his evil, pock-marked face, garnished with the inevitable close-cropped beard and mustache. The deep white scar from lip to chin added a seeming snarl to his features. His gross lips, alternately sensuous and cruel, worked his cigarette from side to side as some men roll a cigar.

But evil as Miguel Belarbi looked, he was an angel of light compared to the lithe, nervous Spaniard who walked back and forth across the room, talking in sharp, staccato voice. There was no more in Benito's face to serve as index to his character than there is in the appearance of a bottle of nitroglycerin—except his eyes. But for these he might have passed for any well-groomed Spaniard of middle age, swarthy, of course, with regular features, black hair and mustache, even a jaw that in profile seemed weak, according to accepted standards of physiognomy.

But Benito's eyes would have given the lie to his face had it been as kindly as that of a Madonna—green-gray, or gray with green flickers, as one sees in ice when it is first broken—metallic, like the sheen of freshly-ground steel—and in the center of each a black hole through which there seemed to peep little grinning red devils. With Miguel one noted only the coarse, brutal face and did not see the eyes at all; but with Benito there was nothing but the eyes, once one had looked into them.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Miguel Belarbi. "I picture to myself my friend Benito Bravo taking the road in company with a man of God. Surely Santa Maria herself will snicker when she observes—to say nothing of the Evil One. Take care, Benito, take care, lest he convert you to a virtuous life!"

But to these jibes, not the first by any means to which he had been subjected since his decision to take Henry Sumpson with him to Tangier, Benito Bravo paid only the attention of a crooked grin; his mind was intent upon the aspects of the matter he had in hand, not upon such humor as Miguel might find in the situation.

He suspected that his friend thus endeavored to avenge himself for the overriding of his objections to the missionary as an ambassador. The idea of the use of the American in this capacity had come to Benito that afternoon when, in possession of Emperor Lee's code message to his bank, it had become necessary for him to plan how to make use of it without thrusting his own head into extreme danger. Emperor Lee himself had given him the germ of the idea, demanding that some fellow American be summoned to conduct the negotiations. But Benito had laughingly assured him that there was no American nearer than Tangier, and his assurance had been made in a menner intended to emphasize to Lee his isolation from his own people. But upon the heels of this statement had come remembrance of some laughable incidents told him by Miguel Belarbi concerning an American missionary who raised pigs and preached the gospel. To Benito had come the realization that here was his tool—an ignorant, fanatical fellow, incapable of understanding more than the most obvious facts in life, capable of being used for almost any purpose without realizing it, and above all, a man whose very character and occupation would shed suspicion. Or, if suspicion should fasten upon him, he was too childishly ignorant to protect himself at the expense of others. Thus reasoned Benito, and thus it came about that Henry Sumpson was summoned from his pigs and his preaching to act as intermediary in the collection of a million dollars ransom.

"If," observed Benito gently, "you have squeezed from your fat carcass the last possible drop of what you consider to be humor, will you see if the horses are ready, so that I may ride?"

Miguel clapped his fat brown hands and like a jack-in-the-box a negro slave popped up in the doorway.

Yes, he assured his master, the horses were ready and waiting, as was also the *Nasrini*—the missionary. Benito, with a curt "*adios*" strode from the room. In the patio he swung into saddle, commanding Henry Sumpson to do likewise. Then, touching his horse with spurs, he passed through the big gateway of the patio, Henry Sumpson jolting behind upon his own mount.

ARZILA is a walled town with two gateways. The gateway in the southern wall opens on the road to Fez, that on the north gives on the highway to Tangier. Wherefore Benito and Henry Sumspon most naturally had to pass through the northern gate, the Bab-el-Tanjerah. They rode swiftly and in a few minutes Henry Sumpson, looking with somewhat longing eyes toward the east, saw a little yellow light which he knew was shining from a window of his home. He watched the light over his shoulder until it was cut off abruptly as the road led into the shadows of an olive grove. Then something occurred which caused Henry Sumpson completely to forget the distant gleam.

There came from the dense shadows of the olive trees an odd sound, much like the hiss of a gigantic snake, but harsher. The horse and rider a dozen feet ahead of him suddenly separated. The horse continued its leisurely trot, but the figure which a second before had been sitting easily in the saddle, rose and remained stationary in the air a moment; then it seemed, to Henry Sumpson's amazed eyes, to settle gently to the ground. The sound of its contact with earth proved, however, that its descent had been swifter than appeared.

Automatically Henry Sumpson drew his own horse to a standstill and leaned forward with open mouth. His only thought was that he had never seen anyone fall from a horse in just that manner, and for a moment he struggled to understand how it could be done. But his meditations were interrupted. A tall figure in Moorish garments came swiftly from the shadows, seeming in the bright starlight to pull himself forward along a rope whose other end connected with the prostrate Benito, now sitting up in the dust and cursing most luridly as he tried to release arms which were held against his ribs as by a vice.

Reaching him, the man from the shadows proceeded to use the rope in a way which Henry Sumpson, who had now dismounted and approached more closely, recognized: with a rawhide lariat, his friend Travers was doing a very thorough job of hog-tying the redoubtable Benito Bravo. The job finished, and in time which would have taken a prize at a rodeo, Travers greeted Henry Sumpson.

"Came in mighty handy, that old rope, eh, my friend? Always carry one with me. Fellow never knows when he's going to need a rope, by gollies—and rawhide makes the strongest rope in the world. When I want a rope I want a rope, not a string. Why that rope—" He laughed and there was a touch of excitement in his laughter, justified perhaps, in one who had just lassoed the terrible Benito. "Why I betcha that rope would hold two like him."

Henry Sumpson scratched his head through a large hole in the crown of his ancient felt hat, looked at Travers and then at the captive, and then back at Travers.

"Yeah," he admitted, "I reckon it would, at that, but—but what's it all about?"

"You'll have to wait until we get back to your place," Travers told him. "Someone might come along, and I want to look this fellow over. Give me a lift with him."

TOGETHER they threw Benito over the saddle of Henry Sumpson's horse, and then, Travers leading his own mount, they retraced their steps until the little yellow light welcomed them into the missionary's house. The half-witted Moorish boy rose from early slumber to gaze with open mouth and wide eyes as they carried Benito into Travers' room, and so remained until the tugging of the horses upon the reins he held reminded him of his own duties.

Travers wasted no time upon the now venomously silent Benito. He tied his hands behind him, and his ankles, and then ran a rope between the two, thus insuring that if Benito were to try any fancy kicking, the result would be unpleasant to himself. Then, removing the rawhide rope he proceeded to search the Spaniard—a search which was performed to the accompaniment of lightnings from Benito's eyes, and hoarse promises as to the fate which inevitably awaited the American. The search ended with the discovery of a folded paper in a money belt next to Benito's hide. Travers unfolded the paper, stared at it, and then cursed with poignant emotion.

On the paper was a message in Lee's private code, bearing Lee's signature—and Travers' code book was in Tangier, fifty miles away.

VIII

FOR a space Travers, chagrined, stared at the code message, a dozen lines of meaningless words. Here and there a word jumped out from the body of the message and seemed to deride him—such words as "endeavor," "hope," and "victory." That the bold signature of Emperor Lee was genuine, there could be not the slightest doubt; he even noted absently that it had been written with the fat, broad-stubbed fountain pen which his friend always carried, and which he had often thought was typical of the man in its broad, blunt lines. Then he looked again toward the corner where Benito Bravo sat propped up against the converging walls, and noted a flicker of amusement in the Spaniard's eyes—a flicker which he himself had sufficient sense of humor to return.

But, although he might perceive an element of the humorous in the situation, Travers could not deny to himself that he was in practically the same situation as before he had cast his lariat over the head of Benito. It had needed no signed message of Emperor Lee's to convince him that his friend was a captive somewhere in the town of Arzila, in all probability in the house of Miguel Belarbi. Now, of course, he was certain of what he had formerly been convinced of, but he had made little progress toward effecting the rescue of his friend. True, Benito Bravo, who perhaps could be reckoned his chief opponent, was *hors du combat*—but Miguel Belarbi without doubt was the real jailer, and needed no aid from Benito in holding safe his captive. And as for the plans of Benito and Miguel, the secret, unquestionably, was locked up in the code message: it might as well still have been locked up in the heart of the Spaniard.

Upon his reflections broke the voice of Benito, startling him, because of its fair quality of English, as well as for other ressons.

"It is most unfortunate, I perceive, Señor Travers, that you do not understand the message," he jibed. "It might be of great use to you. Ho! ho! ho! Do you think I believe you to be His Excellency the Grand Vizier, or the Shiekh-es-Senussi? I am sure that neither the Vizier nor the Shiekh know how to use *la reata*. It was clever of you, Señor Travers, but what are you going to get out of it?"

"A question of more importance to you," replied Travers, "is what you are going to get out of it?"

To his surprise he saw that his words had startled Benito. Was it possible that after all Emperor Lee had not fallen victim to patriotic motives of the Spanish socialists but that Benito Bravo and his friend Miguel had merely seized upon the opportunity to hold him captive for ransom in a country where there was little or no law? The code message from Emperor Lee, the intended journey to Tangier of Benito and the missionary—these made it appear as though such was the case. Wherefore he shot suddenly at Benito the question—

"How much ransom do you demand?"

But he had misjudged his man. Benito, after the one betraying movement, was his cold-blooded self again; the question of dealing with Travers for the ransom of Lee had already been considered by him and rejected: it was one thing to deal with a man who was helpless in captivity, but quite another to bring into the game a man who was at liberty, and who seemed to be able to take care of himself. He shrugged his shoulders and, with a queer gleam in his eyes, handed Travers something else to think about.

"Ransom? Where do you—hm!—get that stuff, as you say? But perhaps—perhaps that message demands ransom; and perhaps—" he hesitated a moment—"perhaps it is the Duke de las Torres saying that your friend has reconsidered his decision to finance the Little War. Why do you not go to Tangier, Señor Travers, for your little book, in order that you may read the message? Your friend will be quite safe until you return."

Travers turned a cold eye upon the Spaniard.

"No safer, my friend, than you are going to be for some time to come," he said, and thereupon, with the aid of the trembly Henry Sumpson, carried Benito into a small room which perhaps had been built for the use of servants, and left him behind a massive oak door, fastened by a huge padlock. The incident was finished for the time being, Travers, finding himself in the same situation he had occupied an hour before, took up his plans as they had been before his capture of Benito. Emperor Lee was captive in the house of Miguel Belarbi, therefore it was up to him to see what could be done at the house of Miguel.

And so he now took his way through the dark, quiet streets which led to this house. First he must reconnoiter, and then, perhaps, he could evolve some method by which he could gain admittance. After that it was in the hands of Allah. Judging from Benito's words, the Spaniard had not known that Travers was in Arzila until the loops of the *reata* had abruptly informed him, wherefore it was probable that Miguel Belarbi was still ignorant of the fact. This would make it easier to catch him by surprise.

Yet Travers did not underestimate the difficulty he would meet in trying to gain access to Belarbi's stronghold. If he only had a legitimate excuse of some sort, even one which would convince the servants whom he knew he would encounter at the gate. Then inspiration came to him and he grinned to himself in the darkness. And as he slippered along there followed at a little distance a shadow which was almost indistinguishable from the night itself.

Travers found the house of Miguel Belarbi—he could identify it now by the missionary's description of its big tiled gateway—but to consider this gate in the massive blank wall was all the reconnoitering possible. There was nothing else to be seen, for the house was entirely surrounded by other houses which had used its walls for walls of their own. Only a tiled gateway in a windowless, wide, wall on a narrow street running like a cañon among the dwellings. Travers had hoped for an isolated house, or at least one semi-detached from its neighbors, in order that the usual methods of ingress might have been abandoned—had hoped for servants' door or windows, for some easier portal than that formal front gate with its iron-studded oaken doors and massive locks, behind which he knew some faithful servitor of Miguel kept guard. He strolled past the place and noted beneath the doors of the gate a gleaming yellow strip, which told him that a tin lantern with burning candle sat beside the guard.

As the American turned and passed again, a peculiar odor came to him—the odor of burning *keef*—that mixture of tobacco and Indian hemp of which a few tiny pipefuls suffice to send the average Moor upon a temporary visit to Paradise.

Travers paused in the shadows and reflected. He wondered how much *keef* the guard had smoked. If this were his first pipeful he would be irritable, suspicious, inimical. If it were his second, he would probably be somewhat kindly inclined toward all the world. If it were his third—and Travers sincerely hoped that it was—his wits would be muddled, he would be half awake and half in that land of dreams which he sought—to be easily stampeded, rattled, and without judgment. And if this were more than the third pipeful the probabilities were that he could not be awakened to action; that everyone else in the household would be paying attention to the iron knocker at the gate before he would.

Travers felt surprise that Miguel Belarbi, with his captive, should be so lax—then relized that no master can keep his servants from their desires. Besides, no doubt, Belarbi felt little need for caution; supposedly no one knew that the American was a captive, and assuredly no one knew that he was in the house of Miguel Belarbi. Yes, Travers hoped that it was the third pipeful of *keef*—or else the second. And realizing that it were better the second than the fourth, he acted promptly.

APPROACHING the gate he pounded the big iron knocker with vigor. Immediately a slow, lazy voice answered him, but he heard no motion.

"*Schoon ja?*" demanded the voice. "Who comes?"

"A friend of your master," replied Travers promptly in Arabic, "with an important message. Open."

Then followed sounds as of a person rising, grunts to indicate that it was a portly person. And yet there was no grumbling, at which Travers took heart.

"I—I will consult my master," droned the voice.

Travers, listening intently to the timbre of that voice, knew that he had been fortunate: the man was in stupid condition. He would obey the sudden command.

"My business is too important for delay," said Travers sharply. "Open at once—and then take this message to your master."

For a few breaths there came neither words nor the sound of action from beyond the gate. Then a key grated in its lock, the yellow bars beneath the doors took motion and a small door swung inward, revealing a gray-bearded old man in brown *djellaba*, holding a lantern aloft and squinting with near-sighted old eyes at the man who had disturbed his dreams. Travers stepped forward and was within the court-yard of Miguel Belarbi.

"Take me at once now to your master," he commanded. "Never mind the gate," as the old man turned to lock the door in place again. It would be well, Travers thought, to have free egress, should occasion demand.

Leaving the gate unlocked, the old man led the way. Travers felt jubilant; there had been only one chance in a thousand of such luck. But his elation was short lived. As they entered the patio of the house itself, a big negro, scantily dressed, arose from the ground and barred their progress. In the light of the candle lantern he appeared gigantic, terrible. The light slipped from his black skin in a way which reminded Travers of the light of automobile lamps on asphalt. A powerful beast as every detail of his body showed—round head with the face little more developed than that of a gorilla. Huge hands which hung almost to his knees. Shoe-button eyes and great lips. One great arm he held out to bar their passage. Travers knew that here was no opportunity for appeal, command, or force. Wherefore, without hesitation, but with a very grateful thought concerning the automatic which clung against his left ribs—he drew from his *shakarah* Emperor Lee's cipher message and handed it to the black.

"Tell your master that the Spaniard is in trouble and has sent me to see him concerning this message."

The black enclosed the message in one great hand and peered at Travers with his little black eyes, and the American was thankful that the old guard, lassitudinous now from the effects of his *keef*, held the lantern near the ground instead of aloft as before.

At last, satisfied by his inspection, or having reached a conclusion through tortuous channels of thought, the black grunted, turned, and made toward the doorway of the house. Travers followed him as far as the portal and there stopped: with the black to oppose him it would avail him little to attempt to enter the house until requested to do so. Better to wait a space in patience until—as he hoped—Belarbi should send for him.

In a few moments the black appeared in the doorway and made a gesture for Travers to enter. Inhaling deeply Travers gave the pistol, which was now in his belt beneath his cloak, a final adjustment, and followed the negro. He was in—and it was quite possible that he would have to fight his way out. It would take more than one well-placed bullet to stop this big black, he reflected. And how many other servants did Belarbi have about him?

They made toward the end of the hall where Travers could see a big, lighted room, not shut off by either curtain or door from the hallway. This was not so good: if his meeting with Belarbi was to be in that room there would be little opportunity for secrecy. The slightest cry could be heard throughout the house. But to his relief the negro came to a halt two-thirds of the way down the hall and threw open a door.

Travers stopped upon the threshold and looked in. It was a small, windowless room, lighted now by two tall candles in big brass candlesticks. These showed a pock-marked, bearded man—a white scar showing through the dark beard, and twisting his lips—sitting upon floor cushions smoking cigarettes. From descriptions he had heard Travers knew him as Miguel Belarbi. Much to his surprise he saw that upon the floor beside Belarbi's cushion stood a bottle of Scotch whiskey, half empty, a bottle of soda and a glass, which now held a bubbling amber mixture.

PERHAPS the alcoholic liquor which Miguel told himself was consumed by the Spanish half of him and not by the Moslem half, to whom it was prohibited, had rendered him less cautious than usual, but he was no whit less dangerous. He so little expected that there could be any interference with this affair with Benito, that he was taken at a disadvantage; perhaps the mere fact that he held in his hand the code message over which he and Benito had gloated that afternoon, had convinced him that his visitor was an emissary from Benito Bravo. At any rate he gave curt orders to the black to withdraw and close the door, and then motioned Travers to a seat upon a cushion opposite him. He even produced another tall glass from behind a cushion, concocted a whiskey-and-soda and set it before the American.

But as he did so, he leaned forward to look more closely at his guest. His fingers released their hold upon the glass and he drew back, staring at Travers' face and fumbling beneath the cushions piled about him. Travers, noted the change of features from smiling cordiality to sudden surprise, to suspicion, to conviction; he knew, not that Belarbi had recognized him, but that Belarbi had seen that his beard, mustache and eyebrows had been blackened with charcoal—no doubt he had unconsciously touched his face and thus left a mark which under close inspection would betray him. Nevertheless the game was in his hands; Miguel Belarbi suddenly stiffened and moved only to breathe; he was looking into the muzzle of the American's pistol.

IX

HIS gun nuzzling the right ribs of Miguel Belarbi, Travers tossed the cushions aside and took possession of the revolver for which Miguel had been groping. Then, still covering his man, he backed to the door and dropped into place the wooden bar which served as a lock. After which, because of his experience in Moorish dwellings, he lifted the silken draperies which covered three sides of the room, to make certain that no concealed doorway would give ingress to unexpected and unwelcome visitors. Behind the third of the hangings he found a small door set in the heavy masonry of the wall, but a glance showed him that this was also barred on the side which confronted him. As he was about to drop the hanging the sound of a cough came to him through the oaken door, a deep-chested, powerful explosion which he thought he recognized.

"Lee," he called. "Is it you, Lee?"

And a big voice boomed back, ungrammatically, but with conviction:

"You're —— right it's me. That you Travers?"

"Right," Travers assured him, "and I'll have you out of there in a jiffy."

He raised the bar of the door and thrust against it, watching Belarbi carefully meanwhile. He saw a sneer come upon Miguel's pock-marked face, and at the same moment realized that the wooden bar had concealed a big keyhole; understood that his release of Lee was not so imminent as he had supposed.

"Got to get a key first," he called to Lee, and turned back to give his attention to Belarbi. That offspring of two races still sat patiently upon his cushions with both hands elevated in accordance with Travers' commands. But although he had not moved, he had been thinking.

"Give me the key," demanded Travers, striding up to him.

Belarbi shrugged, looked again into the muzzle of the American's automatic and seemed to surrender. Slowly he lowered one hand and made as if to search inside his vest. Travers, on guard against the sudden drawing of a weapon, watched him coldly, finger tight on the trigger of his gun. And, watching him for this, the American was caught at a disadvantage when, with surprising agility, Belarbi, using his crossed legs as a pivot, threw himself forward and struck him heavily at the knees.

The American made an instinctive but vain effort to keep his balance, the gun flew from his hand and his next realization was that Belarbi's hands were at his throat. He was no weakling, but his first effort to tear away those strangling hands showed him that his opponent had even greater strength. And then, with that saving coolness which always came to him in a great emergency, Travers relaxed and lay quiet, bearing the agony of the pressure upon his throat. Belarbi laughed harshly.

"Ho! ho!" he snarled, "a great man, this! A strong man! A man who tricks Belarbi in his own house. *Allah!* A baby!"

And then from behind him rose Travers' knees, swiftly as a snake strikes. Long-limbed as he was, they struck Belarbi with terrific force in the back of the neck, just at the base of the skull. Belarbi's neck made a queer snapping sound, he blinked once and then fell forward on his face.

"That," observed Travers to himself as he arose, rubbing his throat, "is that. And now just to prevent further complications——"

He crossed the room and took the long white turban which Belarbi had laid aside, and with it he bound him securely. In Belarbi's belt he found a big iron key. He approached the door which led to Lee's prison and threw the lock. At that moment he heard a sound at the main door and turning, his amazed eyes saw the wooden bar slowly rising, as though of its own accord. He had little time, however, to reflect upon this phenomenon. He realized suddenly that his pistol lay across the room. He jumped to it and bent to pick it up.

AS HE rose, the big black, with a bellow of rage, lunged like a gorilla toward him, his huge fingers working, his great lips twisted in a snarl. There was no time for thought, no time to shout to Lee to come. No time for anything save for the *crash, crash, crash!* of three cartridges sending their lead into the unhuman mass of black flesh before him. The black took three steps against the shock of that lead and the third brought him within reaching distance of the American, who had backed against the wall. The huge black hands at the end of their long arms rose above him, the fingers curled like talons.

The breath from the negro's distorted lips was hot in his face. Blood spurted from the black's breast where the bullets had torn through. Nausea swept Travers like a flame. Once those awful, menacing hands reached him they would tear his throat out as easily as though it were paper. He saw the hands descending and at the motion he sank swiftly to his knees and fired upward once, twice. The black hands paused in mid-air, the negro stiffened, coughed once, whirled and fell, his head upon the shoulder of Miguel Belarbi, his master. At the same moment the small concealed door opened and into the room came Emperor Lee, blinking at the light with eyes accustomed to darkness, staring curiously, but without comment, at Travers' now disarranged native make-up.

Emperor Lee showed the marks of his captivity. He wore neither shoes nor coat. His trousers which had been slept in, wrinkled about his legs, and his once immaculate white silk shirt showed the daubs of his prison walls. His brown beard had lengthened, his hair was like a pile of jackstraws, and his eyes bloodshot from attempted vision in darkness. But although his exterior was not that of the president of the All-American Metals Corporation, the man inside had not altered. His vitality and force were still at maximum, and his indomitable, stubborn ego knew no change. He stared a moment at the body of the black, nodded his head slowly and growled:

"Good work, Travers!" His look switched to the scowling Miguel Belarbi. "But why didn't you finish this brute at the same time?"

In silence Travers held out to him Belarbi's pistol. Lee took it, and with a speculative eye considered Belarbi for a moment, then with a crooked smile slipped the gun into his pocket.

"Have to turn him loose first," he observed.

"Quite so," agreed Travers. "That's why."

"Any more of them around here?" asked Lee.

"If there were," answered Travers, "I reckon they've gone. But I guess that big nigger was the official watchdog."

"But how the —— did you get here?" inquired Lee, seating himself upon a cushion.

"We haven't time for much of a postmortem, I should say," returned Travers, "but briefly— Oh, by the way, what was that code message you wrote? I got hold of it through the process of putting a rope over your Spanish friend, Benito, when I learned that he was headed for Tangier."

"Benito?" questioned Lee. "That fellow who was my guide? Oh, I remember—that's what Juan called himself."

"The same," agreed Travers. "But his name is Benito Bravo, and he's a well known Spanish anarchist. Now—about the code."

"Ransom," replied Lee. "A million. But I intended to take it away from them afterward if it was the last thing I did. Benito, eh? An anarchist!"

"Thought so," said Travers, referring to the code message. "But my code book was in Tangier. Well, then, I brought the message to Belarbi and got by on the strength of it. Caught Belarbi asleep at the switch and tied him up. Enter Mr. Gorilla, actuated by a sincere desire to take me to pieces, with the results which you see. And that's all. Nasty business though!" He looked with repugnance at the dead negro.

"Don't need to say thank you," said Lee. "Suppose I'd better get the rest of my clothes so we can get out while the getting out is good. Want to get back to Tangier to close that option with the Duke. Funny thing!" he exclaimed, "fellow named Jeffries in Gibraltar warned me that the Spanish socialists would be after my hide, and for a while I thought that Benito was the boy assigned to do it. And here it turns out that it was nothing but ransom he was after. All the rest was hot air—to scare me, I guess."

Travers gazed at him with narrowed eyelids.

"Don't you think for one holy minute, Lee, that the desire for ransom was behind this. Benito Bravo is one of the inner circle of Spanish radicals. On the face of it he has tried to double-cross his fellows. Probably the temptation to get his was too strong. But don't forget for a breath that what the Spanish radicals want in the present instance is not your money, but to prevent you from going in with the Duke, from affording the sinews of war for the Mar Chica business."

"Hmph!" said Lee. "That's what Benito said himself—but I don't believe it. Not yet. I've got ten days to close my option with the Duke, and by the whiskers of Moses, I'm going to do it. If any —— bunch of anarchists think they are going to monkey with my own private buzz saw, they're going to lose some fingers."

"Yes?"

Travers' tone was gentle, reflective. He was thinking that there were only ten days more for the option to run—although the Duke would most probably be extremely glad to close the deal at any time in the future. "Yes? Then I wonder what you will say when I tell you that I will not permit you to close that deal?"

He heard a choking sound and looked around at Lee. The Emperor's face was flushed, his mouth hung open and his eyes stared at Travers as a child might stare at some one who, without reason, had boxed his ears.

Travers smiled faintly.

"You—you—won't permit—me to close that deal!" Lee's voice was incredulous. Then his face cleared, the flush subsided. "Quit your kiddin'. Quit your kiddin', Travers. My sense of humor's blunted by the last few days in jail."

Travers rose and took a few quick nervous steps before he turned upon his friend and declared, in a voice which neither held humor nor permitted the thought of it:

"I mean precisely what I say, Lee. For my friend, Charles Winton Lee, friendship demanded that I get you out of a dangerous situation. But there my friendship stops. As Emperor Lee, president of the All-American Metals Corporation, I'll see you in Hades before I'll permit you to finance this war against my friends. If you think for one minute that I have done this—" he waved a hand toward the dead black—"so that you and the Duke may carry on an unjustified war—an infernal robbery of Morocco—you've got a lot of guesses coming. I won't let any one else get hold of you if I can help it—but as sure as as your name is Lee, I will hold you prisoner myself until you have a change of heart."

During this declaration of war Emperor Lee had squatted upon the cushion, blinking upward with amazement at his friend. As Travers' words had fallen upon his ears —words which he very swiftly realized revealed a Travers he had neither known nor suspected—his jaws clenched, expanding the muscles in his heavy jowls, his eyelids lowered, his body stiffened, and he breathed audibly through his nose. Emperor Lee was back from Elba.

As Travers ceased speaking the eyes of the two men, clinched and fought, but neither fell. Emperor Lee rose slowly, still facing Travers.

"I see," he said quietly, "that you are serious."

"Never more so in my life," emphasized Travers.

"Very well," declared Lee, "and you may also write it down in your book that I am serious also. I appreciate what you have done—but not to the extent of letting you run my business. Not by a —— sight! Just because you have got some silly woman's idea about this pestilential country——"

"Of which, incidentally," observed Travers, quietly, "you know less than you know of astronomy."

Lee ignored the comment.

"—you are not yet president of the All-American."

"And I would not be on a bet—at the present moment," offered Travers.

"My program," announced Lee, giving his slow words emphasis, "is to walk out of here, get a horse and ride to Tangier. And within an hour after I get there my deal with the Duke will be closed by cable." He shook a long, strong, forefinger in the general direction of Travers' nose. Travers smiled and there was indulgence in the act.

"As a program," he said, "I can pick no flaws with your plan. But as a matter of fact—" he paused and gave Lee a direct, steady look— "As a matter of fact you would have extreme difficulty getting out of this room—I may be permitted to doubt that you could do it—and——"

"Why not?" The two words came like a double pistol shot, and with the question Lee pulled Belarbi's revolver from his pocket and covered his fellow American.

Travers looked down at the shining weapon, raised his eyebrows in mock surprise and said gently:

"It isn't loaded."

He grinned good-naturedly at Lee, who with an oath, took a step backward, broke the revolver and stared at the five empty cylinders of the chamber.

"It was a precaution I thought best to take," added Travers.

"You win," growled Lee, and added, "for the time being."

"And now," said Travers, "we had better be on our way—if you will get the rest of your clothes."

With a snort of disgust Lee acted upon the suggestion.

"But don't you think for a minute," he threw over his shoulder, "that you can bluff me with a gun. You are going to have your hands full from now on."

YES, Travers reflected, there was much truth in those words. Events had taken place swiftly, had jumped ahead of his schedule. The mere release of his friend from the house of Belarbi had seemed such a doubtful undertaking, had appeared to be a matter which would require some days, instead of hours, of effort, that he had made no plans for the time when Emperor Lee should be at liberty again, and his own captive instead of Belarbi's. He grinned at the thought of trying to intimidate Lee with a pistol, and again at the thought of trying to beat that powerful physique into submission. No chance for either. No, his only recourse was strategy.

Emperor Lee knew no more about Arzila or Morocco in general than he knew of the streets of Mars. After his recent experience, bluff though he might about the unimportance of it, Travers knew that he must entertain at least a suspicion that powerful forces were operating against him, that a real menace hung over him. It was scarcely probable, thought Travers, that Lee would be fool enough to make a break for liberty once they were outside the walls of Belarbi's house. Where could he go, except into further danger? Ignorant of the city, ignorant of the language, ignorant of the people—no, Travers decided, Lee would undoubtedly stay with him until he felt that he had at least one foot on firm ground. And before that time came, he resolved, Lee should find it impossible to reach a cable office. For a moment he speculated with some amusement upon the legal aspects of the part he played. Then he remembered that in Arzila, Morocco, in that particular year of our Lord, the only law was the law of power. And as for what might come later, he sincerely doubted that Emperor Lee would ever take steps which would admit to the world that he had gotten himself into hot water, least of all that he had been held prisoner by one of his own men. Nevertheless, the president of the All-American was a dangerous *hombre*.

Lee returned from his cell fully dressed and with a curt "Let's go."

Neither of them saw a hunch-backed figure slide with the noiselessness of a shadow from a corner down the hallway and dart on unslippered feet into the darkness of the patio.

X

IN THE marketplace of Arzila was a new commercial house.

Unless one was informed as to these matters one might have believed it to be merely the temporary abiding place of some Moroccan tramp, for it consisted of a crudely constructed A-tent composed of numerous pieces of coarse burlap patched together with string of many colors, the whole reflecting but little credit upon the Omar Khayyam whose hands had fashioned it. It was by no means as big as a barn—in fact, not much bigger than an outsize dog-house—and certainly not nearly so wide as a church door; but it would serve to protect from the scorching African sun the big, brown-bearded countryman who, smudged with charcoal dust, did not need the advertising offered by the three or four bags of carbon squatting drunkenly in front of the tent.

And now that night had come, it served equally well as a bedroom for the proprietor. Had his long form been much greater than the six-feet-two it was, either the top of his head or the soles of his feet must necessarily have been exposed to the cool night air; as it was, they were just within the protection of the burlap. Wrapped in his carbon-smudged *djellaba*, the charcoal seller, lying upon his broad back with the hood of his garment drawn down over his face, snored the snores of the just and the care-free.

Now, however, through the market-place came a figure, thrown into faint relief by the starlight, which paused in front of the charcoal merchant's tent and inclined his ear toward the snorings.

"Where the sound comes from there will his head be," he reflected aloud, and passed to the other end of the tent. But although the charcoal merchant, to judge from his nasal song, had been in deep slumber, this song came to an end before the newcomer, placing his head close to the burlap, spoke. And there was a faint *click*. Thus do those sleep who are accustomed to danger.

"*Oyé, Sidi!*" whispered the one outside, in Arabic. "It is I, Mustapha, and there is news for your ears."

"Enter, then, enter," responded a sleepy voice, accompanied by the sounds of a moving body. A match flared, followed by the steadier flame of a candle. Mustapha entered the tent by the simple process of lifting up the end and wiggling through. Inside the charcoal seller, squatting cross-legged upon his blanket, raised an inquiring eyebrow at the youth. Mustapha squatted beside him, took from his *shakarak* a package of French cigarets, one of which he proceeded to light, slowly and with reflective face.

"If this tent were as big as a mosque, your cigárets nevertheless would foul the air," observed the charcoal seller. "No! Name of Allah, no!" He waved aside the proffered package. "And what is there afoot which you consider of sufficient importance to spoil my night's rest?"

"It is your own order," answered the youth. "Because of that, I came. There is business afoot—peculiar business of which I know everything, but understand little. Perhaps you—" He paused and grinned with a little impudence into his elder's face.

"Perhaps, perhaps," retorted the charcoal seller. "I set more value upon what your eyes see and your ears hear than upon what goes on in your head. Give me the facts and then," sarcastically, "if I be unable to put them together in the right way, the fault be mine."

"*M'zien!*" agreed the boy. "Good! This is what I know. I rode, as you are aware, from Tangier to Arzila with the American. Arriving near the city he was set upon by a holy man of the *Nasrinis*, shouting, 'Pigs!' Pigs! Pigs!' and importuning him for aid. The American, being somewhat crazy no doubt, thereupon went to the house of the lamenting one and instructed him as to the treatment of the sick pigs. At the same time he discovered that there was a room at the missionary's house which he might occupy. Wherefore after I had cared for our mounts and baggage, I requested permission to spend the night with my cousin Achmido."

"Who," interrupted the older man, "lives in Fez, a hundred and fifty miles from here."

Mustapha grinned and nodded.

"That," he remarked, "is not known to the American. However, I judged that Sidi Travers would not be annoyed at my absence." The youth paused, and with great deliberation extracted another cigaret from his package and lighted it.

"Whenever His Royal Highness desires to proceed—Son of Evil!" exclaimed the big man.

Mustapha shot the butt of his consumed cigaret with nice accuracy through a gaping hole in the front of the tent.

"And now I shall tell you the story," went on Mustapha. "At the fall of darkness I returned to the house of the missionary that I might observe from the shadows what should take place. Shortly the missionary came forth and went to the city. Him I did not follow. But shortly thereafter a Moor came from the house, mounted a horse and also went toward the city. Now I was not deceived. I knew that there was no Moor in the house of the missionary. Therefore my head told me this was no Moor but the American in Moorish garments. So I followed him, cautiously. He did not go to the city, but stopped on the road in the olive grove of which you know. Soon after there came two horsemen, one of them being Benito Bravo and the other the missionary. With a rope the American pulled Benito from his horse, tied him up and carried him back to the house of the missionary, where he locked him up. Then again he went forth, toward the city, and again I followed. Soon after he had passed through the gate I saw a hunch-backed Jew come from a doorway and follow him. Thereafter I followed the Jew. Eventually we neared the house of Miguel Belarbi. There the American secured admittance in some manner of which I know nothing, leaving the gate open behind him.

"Through this gate very quickly followed the hunch-back, and then I also entered, finding the patio deserted save for an ancient servant who I am sure was tied up and rendered silent by the hunch-back. The patio was dark and so I waited there to see what might take place. Soon came the sound of shooting. Three shots there were and then two more. I crept up to the doorway to listen—and at the end of the hallway, listening to the talk of Sidi Travers and one whom I naturally took to be Sidi Lee—I saw the hunch-back. The voices of the Americans at first were too low for me to hear, but after a while they grew angry and then I heard. Sidi Travers demanded of Sidi Lee—is it not fortunate that I know English?—that he give up the plan he had made with the Duke de las Torrres. Sidi Lee would not agree to do so, and their words grew harsh. And at last—I remember even the words—Sidi Travers told Sidi Lee very strongly, that he, Sidi Travers, would never permit Sidi Lee to do this thing that he planned; that he would hold him captive even as Benito Bravo had tried to do."

"*Allah!* That is good!" exclaimed the charcoal seller. "That is as I hoped Sidi Travers would do, but feared he would not.

His words are the words of a man. And then?"

"And then," concluded Mustapha, "I saw the hunch-back hurrying down the hallway and so I came away swiftly—to consult with you. It was in my mind that even though Sidi Travers intended to hold the other American captive, there was this devil of a hunch-back to be thought of."

The charcoal seller nodded his head slowly, in concurrence with this opinion.

"Yes; I agree with you. A Jew, Hmph! A hunch-back! Hmph! Perhaps, perhaps."

"But why," questioned Mustapha, "Why, if Sidi Travers desired to prevent Sidi Lee from concluding his business with the Duke, why did he not let him stay captive of Benito Bravo and Belarbi?"

"That," replied the elder man, "would puzzle you. You are yet young and see but one side of a thing. Perhaps Sidi Travers regards matters with some strangeness, as do all Americans. And yet, I think that I in his place should do as he has done. Look you, Mustapha, he is a friend—has been a friend—of Sidi Lee. Therefore friendship demands that he accomplish Sidi Lee's release from the hands of his enemies. But Sidi Travers is a man divided: he is also a friend of Morocco—a friend of us who strive to keep the foreigner from overcoming us. Not only in words, of which I have heard many, but in actions, of which I have seen a few. Hence Sidi Travers is a man divided, one half against the other. He must protect his friend and he must protect his friends. Truly I admire him—and I can conceive of no other course which he could have taken. His position is difficult. He must fight both against and for Sidi Lee, and both for and against—us. Most difficult! Allah only knows how the matter will result."

"The thing becomes more clear," observed Mustapha, nodding his head in youthful imitation of his elder. "But for me—I do not think I could fight on two sides at the same time. However——"

The charcoal seller cut short his reflections.

"Nor do I believe you could," he snapped dryly. "Go now," he commanded, "back to the house of the missionary. Sidi Travers must take Sidi Lee to that place—he has no other. And I—" he stretched huge arms and yawned, "I shall continue the sleep you have interrupted."

Mustapha departed, but the charcoal seller did not again go to sleep. Instead, after a little space during which the sound of Mustapha's slippers in the cobbled streets grew fainter and fainter, he extinguished his candle, left the tent and made his way through the marketplace.

XI

WHEN Travers and Lee, having made their way without words from the dark and narrow streets of the town along the bit of country road, reached the house of the missionary, they met surprise. Henry Sumpson, with disheveled hair, blood-stained face and his shirt half torn from his shoulders, rushed to meet them, waving his arms and shouting disconnected phrases.

"He—he struck me!" cried Henry Sumpson. "He threw me out of my own window! See my shirt! See my face! He said he would kill me! Oh, I'm so glad you've come!"

Travers succeeded, after a few quiet question in calming the little man, who led him and Lee to the house to show them a now paneless window through which, he averred, he had made his exit at the hands of Benito Bravo.

"And he's gone," he assured Travers. "Yes, he's quite gone!"

Gradually the story assumed form. Benito Bravo, left with the missionary, had taken advantage of his childish simplicity. He had suddenly developed an excruciating pain as the result of his bonds, and Henry Sumpson, out of the kindness of his heart had tried to loosen the cords somewhat. Very abruptly Benito's hands had come free; he had seized his benefactor and used him as a cushion until he had got free of the rope which held his ankles. Then, apparently in sheer brutality, he had hauled Henry Sumpson to his feet, had struck him in the face, and ended up by tossing him head first through his own window. After which he had walked off into the darkness.

Travers sympathized with the missionary, bathed and plastered his face, and quieted him. He was not greatly worried at the Spaniard's escape, although he scarcely underestimated Benito's ability for retaliation. However, it seemed highly improbable that even with the aid of his friend Miguel Belarbi, he would make any direct attempt so long as the two Americans were together.

He was much more concerned with the problem presented in the person of Emperor Lee. He had judged correctly that Lee was not fool enough to separate himself in the unknown city of Arzila; and as soon as he could make the opportunity, Travers paid the native boy at Henry Sumpson's house to take his horse into the market place and keep it there until he should come for it. Emperor Lee would scarcely be so stubborn that he would attempt to negotiate the distance to Tangier on foot. Lee refused to talk save to say that he was going to bed.

Travers needed only to look at the face of the president of the All-American to know that there was no weakening in Lee's determination to consummate his deal with the Duke de las Torres.

Emperor Lee sought sleep on the bed in the room which Travers had been using, and there, after he had had a little talk with the missionary, Travers joined him, locking the door and putting the key into his pocket. It was late, both men were tired out, and very soon they were asleep.

Travers was awakened, brought upright from his mattress, by an unearthly racket—a racket which seemed compounded of the screeches of all the wind instruments in an orchestra gone mad. Obviously it came from the pig-pens, and obviously every pig, whatever the reason, was doing its best to make the night hideous. Travers knew pigs, but, he reflected, he never had heard an entire sty go mad before. And there was a note of pain in the shriekings. There came a knocking at the door and the voice of Henry Sumpson imploring him for aid. Travers was tempted to consign both the missionary and his pigs to the dickens; then the memory of the missionary's experience at the hands of Benito Bravo rose before him.

He owed something to the missionary, after all, silly as his demands might be, he reflected. He looked over at Emperor Lee and was amazed to see that the president of the All-American slept uninterruptedly—snored. True, his head was wrapped in the blanket, both ears covered, still Travers did not see how the infernal squealing failed to penetrate. He rose, gave one thought to the possibility of Lee's making his escape, abandoned it at the moment of its birth—for where could Lee go?—and went forth to see what was the matter with Henry Sumpson's swine.

The investigations of Travers and Henry Sumpson into the cause of the pandemonium in the pig-sty resulted only in their conclusion that the swine were suffering from mob hysteria, or herd insanity. There seemed to be no other reason for the wild squealing and wilder racing around of the sty's occupants. Nothing was visible which might have frightened them, and besides, pigs don't get frightened in that way—not to the extent of trying to squeal their heads off.

Henry Sumpson leaned upon the boards of the fence, one hand holding a lantern, the other scratching his head in perplexity.

"Crazy," observed Travers. "Just plain crazy, by gollies. Couldn't be sick; if they were they couldn't make so much noise—even with the bellyache."

"Mighty funny," said Henry Sumpson, still scratching. "Mighty blame funny. I never saw pigs act that way before. Can—can we do anything? There isn't anything we c'n do for 'em is there, Mr. Travers?"

Travers was firmly of the opinion that there wasn't, and said so.

"Let 'em squeal themselves out," he added, "and let's go back and get some sleep; I need it."

They made their way back to the house, the little missionary pausing every few steps to cast a puzzled look back at the pig-pen, apparently tempted to return for further observation of the riot. But Travers had him firmly by the arm and thus they eventually reached the house. The squealing now seemed somewhat less in volume, or lower in pitch, Travers could not quite determine which. Even a pig cannot squeal indefinitely.

"Good night, Mr Travers," said Henry Sumpson at the doorway.

"Good night," replied Travers, turning at the entrance to his room. "Good ——, thunder and lightning!"

He sprang into the room and seized the blankets on Lee's bed; seized them and stared and shook them, as though Lee, who most manifestly was no longer there, might be hidden among their folds.

"He's gone!" he shouted to Henry Sumpson, who came running. "The —— fool has beat it!" He ran out, grabbed the startled missionary and his lantern. "Come on!" he demanded. "He can't have gone far.

Let's find him. Where the deuce could he go to? Maybe he's hiding somewhere around here. Let's look!"

They looked, but no Emperor Lee rewarded their search. They started down the road, and Travers, remembering his western American experiences, examined the dust at the gateway for foot-prints. What he found did not help him; leading away from the house, and superimposed upon the tracks which they had left upon their arrival, were the long, broad marks of two pairs of native slippers, the rounded toe marks indicating clearly the direction the feet had been traveling.

"Now what do you think of that?" demanded Travers. "Two pairs of native slippers have gone away from the house since we came. Lee didn't have native slippers—and who would be the other one anyhow?" Lantern in hand he followed the marks down the road, rod after rod until they led him to the edge of the olive grove. There they disappeared in a smother of prints left by the feet of mules. The two who had worn Moorish slippers had ridden from that point, that was clear.

"But what," Travers demanded of Henry Sumpson and all other existing things, "what has this to do with Emperor Lee?"

If he had been seized and carried off by two natives, where were his footprints? And if—Travers couldn't visualize it—but if Lee had made his escape wearing Moorish slippers—who was the native who accompanied him? He had found no slipper prints leading to the grounds—and yet he knew beyond a doubt, as did also the missionary, he said, that the natives could not fly. There was no mark anywhere of American shoes. The wearers of the native slippers had ridden away. The possibility of Lee's having been carried was denied by the depth of the footprints.

Travers and the missionary, thoroughly puzzled and the former no little chagrined, turned their steps toward the house; the cheap oil lantern cast a pale yellow halo upon the road—they walked in a nimbus of yellow dust kicked up by their feet. But they had gone but a few rods when Travers noted, at the extreme eastern edge of the road, a dark object, half hidden by a spindly weed. He picked it up and saw that it was a greasy black silk skull cap such as is worn by Jews throughout Morocco.

Looking about him in the new area illuminated by the lantern, he was startled to observe, on the ground at a little distance, the contorted figure of a man. He strode toward it. One glance told him two things: the prone figure was that of Benito Bravo, and he was very dead. A small black spot centered in the forehead explained his finish, and having observed these things, Travers looked at the dead man's feet. But they were shod with Spanish shoes; Benito Bravo had not been the wearer of one pair of the native slippers whose prints Travers had traced to this spot.

They carried the body of the Spaniard back to the missionary's house, there to await morning burial, and Travers carried with him also a problem which, exhausted as he was, stretched his eyelids open with persistent fingers until dawn was near. Where had Lee gone? Who were the two men wearing the Moorish slippers? Who had killed Benito Bravo—and why? Whose was the greasy skull cap found near the body? The problem of Lee's whereabouts, and of the slippers, held him less than the puzzle of Benito's death, a puzzle which would have been less difficult perhaps, had it not been for the skull cap. Because, as Travers well knew, only the most extraordinary, amazing circumstances could force a Moroccan Jew to violence.

Through a thousand years they had learned their lesson of slavery and subjection—and in a town like Arzila, where they had still to uncover their heads and carry their slippers in their hands while passing a native mosque, it was inconceivable that one of them could master effrontery enough even verbally to insult any man not of his own ilk. The killing of another, either as murder or in self-defense, was inconceivable. Hence Travers was forced to the only conclusion he reached that night: Either the skull cap had not been worn by the person who had killed Benito Bravo—or that person was not a Jew, regardless of what attire he might wear. He finally fell asleep with questions still passing through his mind to be converted into weird dreams by his subconsciousness. Was it possible that, despite the marks of Moorish slippers, Benito Bravo had again seized Emperor Lee and that Lee had killed him? Was it possible that Benito Bravo had enemies in Morocco, of which he, Travers, knew nothing? Was it possible—was it possible——"

XII

THEY buried Benito Bravo in the cool of the morning, the little missionary sending upward to his God an humble request for merciful judgment upon the Spaniard's soul, and Travers returned to the house—to meet new problems and surprises.

Upon the steps sat a hunch-backed Jew—the Jew who, at the Place of the Three Gates in Tangier, had given him the tip concerning Emperor Lee. The man was clothed in the conventional black gabardeen, black slippers and black skull cap—which, Travers noted with a start, was glaringly new. His face was wrinkled and lined where it was visible above the ragged and dirty gray whiskers. Straggling, unkempt locks of gray hair hung out from beneath the tight-fitting skull cap. His nose was as it should have been for one of his apparent birth, and the dirty hands, which were folded in the lap of his gabardeen, were skinny, clawlike.

Travers wondered what business could have brought the old man to the house of the Christian missionary, and then, drawing closer, he noted the keen gray eyes set under the eaves of heavy gray eyebrows, and wondered whether, after all, the Hebrew was as old as he looked. At his approach the Jew rose and bowed, his head jutting forward from the humped back, somewhat like the head of a turtle from its shell. Then, to Travers' intense amazement, the hunch-back addressed him in excellent English:

"Good morning, Mr. Travers," he said. "I see you have disposed of Benito." He glanced and waved a hand toward the distant spot where the little missionary was now setting up at the head of Benito's grave, a crude wooden cross.

Travers looked at the hunch-back with raised eyebrows and puckered eyelids.

"You seem to know quite considerable about Benito—as well as about English," he observed coldly.

The hunch-back shrugged, or gave what would have been a shrug if it had not been more of a rising and falling of his hump.

"I killed him," he replied calmly.

"You—killed—him!" exclaimed Travers, jarred out of his frigidity, and stared with shocked interest now. This was incredible, impossible—suddenly there came back to him his one clear-cut decision of the preceding night: No Jew had killed Benito, regardless of the skull cap. Again he noted the obvious newness of the hunch-back's head covering, and then his eyes searched with sudden revelation the lined and wrinkled and bearded face of the man before him.

"You killed Benito," he repeated. It was not a question, but a prelude to what followed. "In that case," he continued sharply, "you are no more Jew than I am. Who are you?"

A quick smile deepened the wrinkles in the hunch-back's face.

"I perceive that you know the Moroccan Jews," he said. "You are quite right—the thing was impossible of belief by one who knows Morocco."

Travers acknowledged the implied compliment with a nervous gesture.

"But that," he said, "does not tell me who you are."

"I am," answered the hunch-back, now with a curious crinkle at the corners of his lips, "Bartolo Vasquez, a friend of the Duke de las Torres, and chief of His Most Catholic Majesty's Secret Service. Furthermore, I desire to talk with you in private."

Again he looked towards the laboring missionary, while Travers stared at him with a thousand thoughts hurtling through his head. The Spaniard's disguise, even at a distance of a yard, was perfect. That the gray beard and straggling locks of hair, the lined and wrinkled face, perhaps even the hooked nose itself, were applied art, was certain, but with such marvelous skill had the work been done that, despite his knowledge, Travers could scarcely accept the fact. And this man had killed Benito. That he could understand. He had casually admitted the killing as a matter of no moment.

Well, as chief of King Alfonso's secret service, that could be understood also. Had not he himself killed a human being the previous night! Perhaps Bartolo also had shot in self defense. And now perhaps some light would be thrown upon the mysterious happenings of the past dozen hours.

"If you will be kind enough," the voice of the hunch-back brought him again to the immediate moment, "If you will be kind enough to ask your friend the missionary not to intrude, I would suggest that we go inside the house. I do not wish to be generally observed," he added in explanation.

Travers went again to the earthen mound

where Henry Sumpson now stood looking with approval upon his completed handiwork, and told him of his desire for privacy.

"Oh—sure, Mr. Travers, sure," assented the missionary. "I won't go near the house. Besides—" He smiled brightly up into the face of the taller man. "Besides, I'm goin' to plant some flowers here. Don't you think that a grave always looks better with flowers on it? It don't look so—so cold."

Travers returned to the house and entered, the hunch-back at his heels. In the room which the American had been using they squatted upon cushions and with a sigh of relief the hunch-back took from the leather *shakarah* which hung over his shoulder beneath the black gabardeen, a large gold cigarette case, which he proffered to Travers.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, a moment later, "that is heavenly!"

Travers was inclined to agree with him. The tobacco was of marvellous quality.

"It has been ages since I smoked. And now, Señor Travers—" He hesitated, reflecting while he inhaled deeply of the smoke. In fact I find myself in a peculiar position." Travers' eyes questioned him. "In connection with your friend Lee," explained the Spaniard. "In fact—" he smiled whimsically, "—in fact I think perhaps I find myself in a situation quite similar to yours. I may say that last night I was hidden in the hallway of the house of Miguel Belarbi. Incidentally I was about to come to your relief when it looked as though you could not stop the negro. But when I saw that you could handle him alone—" He waved the incident aside, smiling at Travers' surprise.

"The important thing is that I overheard your—hm—conversation with Señor Lee. When you told him that you would not permit him to consummate the negotiations with my friend the Duke. Now you will understand, of course, Mr. Travers, that up to that point I was your ally. As soon as the Duke learned that Señor Lee had been foolish enough to come to Morocco, he requested that I follow, anticipating, of course, that there would be trouble. In Gibraltar I learned what I had not had time to discover before, so hurriedly had been my departure from Spain; that is, that Señor Lee had fallen into the clutches of one called Benito Bravo. Do you know who Benito Bravo is —was?"

"I know," replied Travers, nodding. "One of the inner circle of the Spanish radicals. But he sold out—or tried to."

"Yes, I know," assented the Spaniard. "And consequently neither the radicals nor the conservatives have lost much by his—hm—passing. To continue then. I learned in Tangier that Señor Lee and Benito had gone southward. Also that Benito had a great friend, a scoundrel by the name of Belarbi, in Arzilla. In my business one acts upon probabilities first, possibilities afterwards. This was a probability. Consequently, having learned of your presence in Morocco by the false telegram which was delivered to Señor Lee in Gibraltar, I ventured to waylay you and suggest that a journey to Arzila might not be fruitless. Furthermore, I was not many miles ahead of you most of the way on the road." He paused to inhale tobacco smoke again, and Travers took advantage of the interruption to say—

"And you say you were in the house of Belarbi last night?"

The Spaniard nodded and shot twin clouds of smoke through his nose.

"You managed to have the door in the gate left open," he pointed out, "and the old man went back to his *keef* pipe as soon as you were inside the house. It was a small matter to tie him up. When you were about to leave the house with your—shall we say former?—friend, I made my exit, apparently unseen by you, and came to the olive grove, back the road a little distance, to await developments. I had been there but a short time when I heard, and then saw, someone approaching the grove from the direction of this house. As he passed where I lay hidden, his silhouette against the stars showed that he wore Spanish clothing—and his angry mutterings told me that he was Benito. Of course I knew that you had captured Benito; also then, that he had escaped from you. After a little I saw the glow of his cigaret back in the grove, and concluded that Benito, like myself, was awaiting the time when you and Señor Lee should again be domiciled in the house of the missionary. Shortly thereafter you and your friend passed. When I was satisfied that you were probably asleep, I ventured upon my little trick—with the pigs," he added.

Travers saw a little light.

"What in the deuce," he demanded, "did you do to those pigs?"

The chief of the king's secret service grinned broadly.

"A little acid squirted on their hides," he explained. "They do not like it."

Travers was forced to smile.

"That is manifestly true," he agreed. "And then——"

"And then while you and the missionary were investigating the disturbance, I gained the house——"

"You didn't come by the road," offered Travers, thinking of the marks—or lack of marks—in the dust.

The Spaniard shook his head.

"No, I came from the other side," he agreed. "Your friend sleeps soundly," he continued. "Very soundly. But I awakened him, explained that I was an emissary of the Duke and that I was making it my business to get him out of there. You see, Señor Travers, after what you told him—well, it was just as bad to have him in your hands as in the hands of Benito."

Travers smiled grimly, nodding understanding of the Spaniard's opinion, and waited for him to continue.

"Very well then—we will talk about that later. I found in the closet the Moorish garments which you had worn so becomingly earlier in the evening, and from them I took the *djellaba* and the slippers——"

"——!" exclaimed Travers. "I never thought of looking for my slippers. Never mind. Go on."

"—and had Lee put them on. Then, having to take the risk of detection, we went forth swiftly to the olive grove."

Travers wagged his head reflectively.

"That," he commented aloud, to himself, "is where the double slipper marks came from."

"We reached the olive grove," Bartolo was proceeding, "and—I cannot honestly say that I tried to avoid trouble—with Benito, I mean. In fact—" he smiled grimly— "in fact I even talked with Señor Lee a little—so that Benito should hear; in English, of course. The result was as I had anticipated. Benito suddenly appeared before us in the road, pointing a pistol. I think that he believed me to be you, having heard two voices talking in your own language. However that may be, he did not see—and never did know—that I held my own pistol ready. It was impossible, of course, to do anything with the body so I left him there, knowing that some one would find him in the morning."

Travers could find no grief in his heart for the sudden termination of Benito Bravo's career. But he did feel a slight shiver at the very commonplace manner in which Benito's executioner referred to his work. Still, he realized, a soft-hearted weakling does not become chief of a country's secret service, especially if that country be Spain. And then the thought that had been pounding in his head during most of the hunch-back's narrative, broke from his lips.

"Then Mr. Lee is now in your hands?" he asked.

Bartolo Vasquez, engaged in lighting a fresh cigarette from the stump of the old one, completed the operation and inhaled deeply before he replied. Then his head wagged in negation.

"Unfortunately—not," he said.

"What!" exclaimed Travers. "Then—then where is he?"

"That," replied the hunch-back, "is a thing which I myself would like to know to a certainty. Scarcely had we carried Benito's body out of the road when I was seized, a sack was thrown over my head and shoulders, a rope tied about my arms and I was left to my reflections while your friend Lee—I judge this by what I heard, not what I saw—was overpowered. I think he made a good fight. At any rate, it took quite a while—during which time I managed to extricate myself, and run away. As I ran I heard the sound of mules' or horses' hoofs——"

"Mules," offered Travers. "I examined their tracks."

"However," concluded the Jew, "as I could see nothing to be gained by trying to trace two riders through the whole countryside at midnight, I went back to the city and went to bed."

"But," demanded Travers, "didn't you get a glimpse of those who attacked you? They were natives, of course?"

"They were natives," agreed Bartolo, "and one of them was an unusually big native. I saw him in the market-place yesterday, squatting in front of a miserable burlap tent selling charcoal. Personally—" he grinned, but there was little mirth in it—"personally I do not think that he is a legitimate charcoal seller."

Suddenly upon Travers' memory broke

the vision of the broad back of the charcoal seller he had passed the afternoon of his entry into Arzila—a broad back and a brown bearded face almost concealed by the *koob* of the dirty white *djellaba*. He stared at Bartolo and Bartolo returned the look.

"Mohamed Ali!" Travers breathed the name.

Bartolo's false gray whiskers wagged.

"Mohamed Ali, I suspect," he agreed.

"And that is why, Señor Travers, you and I must cooperate for the time being—leaving our own differences of desire until later."

XIII

WHILE Travers and the pseudo-hunch-back sat in the house of Henry Sumpson, the missionary, discussing the situation which confronted them, big, brown-bearded Emperor Lee, again a captive, sat upon a cushion in the stronghold of Mohamed Ali at Zinat, and with a voice in which there was vast annoyance, heartily damned Morocco and all things Moroccan—including his prototype, the big, whiskered man who paced the room before him.

Tokens of a struggle marked his face, a bruised and slightly swollen cheek, a scratch upon the other. Emperor Lee had given an account of himself before the strong arms of his captor and his captor's men had pinioned his arms and rendered him helpless. With the unexpected onslaught in the darkness, he had come abruptly to the end of a none too lasting patience. It was bad enough to be tricked by Benito Bravo, worse to become the pawn of his former friend, Travers, still worse, to his mind, to have to be rescued from a fellow American by an emissary of the Spanish Duke; but worst of all, piling irritation upon irritation, was to be set upon by a gang of natives desirous, manifestly, of themselves becoming his captors. What the —— was he, anyhow—a football to be passed from one side to the other, to be kicked about?

Blind anger had swept him, motivated his muscles, but it had been useless. He was up against men and facts which he could neither understand nor control. Now he looked at his big, brown captor, and noted with satisfaction that he also bore a bruised and swollen cheek, where one of his blows had landed. Almost at the exact moment that Travers, on the steps of the missionary's house, had put to the hunch-back the plain question, "who are you?" Emperor Lee demanded the same information from the man striding back and forth before him. He spoke in English and received no reply—only a puzzled look. He tried in French, and his captor's face lighted. Emperor Lee's French was none too good, but it served.

"Who am I?" said the big native. "And what difference does that make to Monsieur Lee? Is not one captor as good as another?"

"Perhaps one may be worse than another," parried the American.

"I assure you you will not find me worse than another," retorted the native, "unless," he added in a tone so level that it held a menace, "unless you fail to do as I command. In that case——"

"In that case," repeated Lee, "no doubt you have your plans made."

"I have," agreed the other, "and they will not be pleasant for you."

"Had you thought at all," asked Emperor Lee, "what my country, the United States of America, might do, as a result of this outrage?"

The face of his captor broke into a broad smile.

"What," he asked, "did they do in the case of Mr. Perdicaris—to the man who held Perdicaris prisoner?"

Lee's face fell. The "Perdicaris Incident" was not a great way in the past; he remembered that the Moroccan government—the Sultan—had paid, not only what the United States had demanded, but what the famous bandit had demanded from the Sultan for his release of the naturalized American. Suddenly a thought struck him and he stared with widening eyes at the man before him.

"You—you are not Mohamed Ali?" he questioned.

Again his captor smiled and bowed a little.

"By that name am I known," he replied. "Wherefore perhaps you will perceive that—what do you say—*le bluff*—will be of little value. You are my prisoner, here in my fortress which has often been attacked, but never taken, by the Sultan's men. Here you will stay until you comply with my demands—or if you do not comply—until—until other steps become necessary."

"Ransom?" offered Lee, insult in his tone, "and how much?"

Mohamed Ali turned upon him in fury.

"No ransom, swine of a Christian! No! The price of your liberty is no such small thing as that. I will tell you precisely what it is. You must withdraw from your proposed alliance with the Duke de las Torres—and you must agree never to renew negotiations with him."

Lee was truly surprized. That confounded Spanish business seemed to be demanding the attention of all Morocco. Suddenly he saw the thing with new eyes—saw that it was a bigger thing than even he had imagined, saw that those who opposed the duke were more powerful, more in earnest, than he had dreamed. But to him, the essence of American business thought, this meant merely that he had under-estimated the value of his connection with the duke: the bigger the opposition the more profitable the enterprise, and naturally the more determined he became to carry out his own plans, regardless of Benito, Travers and Mohamed Ali and all the rest of them.

That Mohamed Ali was in deadly earnest in his attempts to prevent Lee from consummating his deal with the duke was apparent; what was not apparent to the American was that Mohamed Ali's threats were more than a bluff. To this man who had fought his way to the top of the ladder of finance, opposition, bluffs, threats of many sorts—even now and then the menace of murder at the hands of some maniac—were all in the day's work. And as yet his occidental brain accepted the natural limitations which had been imposed upon it by a quarter of a century's battle with other occidental brains. In short, Emperor Lee's mind in his present situation, after all the experiences of the past week or two, still functioned as though its possessor was in New York City instead of Arzila; it refused to accept as a verity Mohamed Ali's threat of death should his demands not be complied with. It was preposterous; in the twentieth century people did not kill each other because of business differences, nor because of motives of patriotism tempered, he felt, by certain commercial considerations. He could bluff as well as the next one; better, he could stand pat and let Mohamed Ali's bluff fizzle out. Another thought occurred to him and he addressed the Berber chieftain.

"Suppose I give you my word that I will give up this business with the duke. You do not think that I would have to respect my word given under these conditions?"

Mohamed Ali stared at him with blank face for a moment.

"Yes," he said, then, nodding his head slowly, reflectively. "Yes, your word would be enough. You are a fighter; I am a fighter—and between strong men a man's word is good."

He continued to look at Lee with questioning eyes, eyes which asked whether the business had reached an end, whether Lee was prepared to withdraw from his Spanish entanglements. But Emperor Lee, having given one straight look at his captor, shook his head decisively. He was filled with a strange feeling that, although under the circumstances there was not the slightest excuse in the world for such quixotic regard for his given word, he would not give it unless he intended to abide by it. What the deuce was the cause of this? he wondered. His common sense told him that a man in his position had a moral right to use any and every possible method to regain his liberty. Yet now, just because this swashbuckling Moroccan bandit and political outlaw had told him he would accept his word, he found it necessary to place the same value upon that word as did his captor.

Emperor Lee was not much of a psychologist where he himself was concerned. His executives he could analyze, take apart and put back together again—but his own reactions were a constant puzzle to him. Had this not been true, he would have realized that in the present instance he was reacting to several very powerful stimuli; personal pride was one of them; his ego subconsciously revolted at the thought of his word not having the value which another might place upon it, be that other outlaw or monarch. He might break his word to a reigning sovereign, to a superior—but not under any circumstances, to one he considered below him or beneath him. And stubbornness was also another very important factor at the moment. He would not give his word unless he intended to keep it—and he did not intend to withdraw from the battle. No, he would stand pat. That was the thing to do: Stand pat and let Mohamed Ali's bluff suffer a blowout.

"I will not give you my word to withdraw," he told the outlaw, "because, as you say, my word would be good." He straightened a little. "And as I do not intend to change my mind—the matter is finished."

"I am glad that you did not give me your promise then," said Mohamed Ali. "I prefer to respect my opponents. Of course I felt that you would not."

He did not tell the American, that once his word had been given, the distrustful oriental would not have been content, but would have kept constant watch to make certain that he did not consummate his plans with the duke.

"And thus," continued Mohamed Ali, "your decision having been reached, so far as your promise is concerned, there remains the possibility of a change in your decision with respect to the duke's affairs."

"I shall not change it," Lee assured him firmly.

Mohamed Ali bowed slightly in polite understanding.

"Nevertheless," he said, "the matter is not to be concluded thus. It is a case of utmost seriousness—for you," he went on. "As the result of which you must have proper time to give it your most earnest consideration."

"I have considered and I am decided," affirmed Lee. But Mohamed Ali shook his head as though in doubt.

"Let us for the moment ignore your decision," he suggested, "and let me place the entire matter before you in a few words, with the request that you do me the honor to consider it well before giving me your final decision. I desire to point out that I make no judgment whatsoever: I merely give you certain facts—and you are your own tribunal. The facts are these: Tomorrow at *moghreb*—sunset—prayer, I shall ask you for your decision. Immediately thereafter, *inshallah*, one of two things will take place." He paused as though considering his last words.

"And those?" questioned Emperor Lee quietly.

"One of them," continued Mohamed Ali without further hesitation, 'is that you will give me your word of honor that you will withdraw from this business with the duke, and will ride to Tangier and freedom upon a horse which I will give you as a small token of my respect."

Emperor Lee shook his head slowly in dissent, but uttered no sound.

"The other," concluded Mohamed Ali, "is that you will face the rifles of my men. You are your own judge; I am merely he who will execute your judgment." There was a *swish* of slippers and Mohamed Ali had gone.

For the first time Emperor Lee, staring with unseeing eyes at the door, which had closed behind the big, brown Berber, experienced a little shiver of physical fear, no, not fear—apprehension. What peculiar quality of Mohamed Ali's voice had made him feel at last that the outlaw was not bluffing? He could not tell, but abruptly he realized that standing pat might turn out to be an exceedingly dangerous method of procedure. And swiftly upon the heels of this realization followed another—that it behooved him to make an effort to regain his liberty, so that sunset on the morrow might not find him Mohamed Ali's captive.

He did not even glance at the barred window of his prison, nor did he study the construction of the door; he knew both of them to be impregnable. Instead, he did an odd thing: he searched his hand-bag, which Mohamed Ali had, with some consideration, secured in Arzila and placed in his prison, and searched through it until he found a little folding mirror. In this he proceeded to study his own face carefully, feature by feature. Then he donned the Moorish *djellaba*—twin to the one of common variety worn by Mohamed Ali, as chance would have it—which he had discarded upon entering his prison, and again consulted the mirror. He smiled at his own face; a few slight changes and he would not be able to say whether he was looking at the physiognomy of Emperor Lee or of Mohamed Ali—especially, he thought, in the miserable light thrown by native candle lanterns. Again he rummaged through his bag, and finding what he sought, he removed the *djellaba* and went to work.

XIV

THE *moghreb* prayer had come and gone with the sinking of the sun below the horizon, the Anghera hills had changed swiftly from brown to blue, to purple and to black, as the night had descended upon them, and the major stars had burst into gleams and now hung like distant lanterns in the skies. With darkness had come to Lee's prison one of Mohamed Ali's servants bringing food—a great bowl of well cooked *kesk'soo*, topped by a baked chicken and studded with boiled vegetables; a little mound of sweetened rice; three disks of thin native bread like oversized pancakes; and a pot of tea from the top of which stuck out a fragrant spray of fresh mint. Setting the tray bearing his supper before Emperor Lee, the servant was withdrawing when Lee said, in French—

"Ask your master, Mohamed Ali, if he will honor me with his presence in half an hour."

The brown Berber servant looked at Lee stupidly and shook his head. Obviously he understood no French, and, thought Lee, assuredly no English either. But as his only other tongue, he tried it, speaking in that weird phraseology which Americans are apt to think is a sort of universal language.

"You tell him, Mohamed Ali, come here, half hour."

A grin broke over the servant's face.

"You desire to see Sidi Mohamed in half and hour?" he asked.

Lee's jaw fell and for a moment he stared at the native as stupidly as the native had stared at him when he addressed him in French.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed. "Where did you learn English?"

"In London, Sidi," replied the servant, still grinning. "When I was a boy the Sultan sent me there to learn—" he hesitated, "to learn what I might learn. I learned the language—and that England was not to be trusted."

"And so you came back to this—this uncivilized country—and Mohamed Ali?" offered Lee.

"Yes, Sidi," acknowledged the servant politely, but there was a little gleam of anger in his eye. "Yes, Sidi, I came back to this uncivilized country, as you say, and to Mohamed Ali also—hoping that perhaps I also might do a little toward keeping Morocco from falling into the clutches of Europe."

"Hmph!" grunted Lee, impressed a little by the servant's tone. "Have you succeeded!"

"I have been able to do but little," confessed the native. "Perhaps I have been of some assistance to Mohamed Ali—" He spoke the name with obvious respect and affection, "—but I don't know; I can only hope so. He is so much greater than I."

"He is, is he, eh?" demanded Lee. "Is he anything special except an outlaw and bandit?"

"Oh yes, Sidi," responded the servant, ignoring the sneer in Lee's voice. "Oh yes, Sidi. He is a very great man in Morocco. He is an outlaw, yes—a political outlaw because his enemies hold the upper hand at present. Some day he will be—" He paused. "Well, some day he will no longer be an outlaw. And of course he is not a bandit. I know what that word means. Sometimes he takes from the rich to give to the poor, and always he fights the battles of those who are oppressed, always he struggles for the protection of his country against those within and without who would destroy it. So he has enemies—many enemies—but more friends." Again he turned toward the door, but again Lee stopped him.

"Don't be in a rush," he said. "I want to ask you a few questions. What's your name and—hm—what do you think about this Mar Chica business?"

"My name is Hassan," replied the servant, "and I fought at Mar Chica for three years. It is not warfare that the Spaniards make, it is murder—attempted annihilation. But they will never succeed."

"No?" queried Lee. "And why not?" He was interested now. "Spain has more money and more men than Morocco."

"Perhaps," agreed Hassan, "but perhaps I can explain the Mar Chica situation to you. I studied medicine and surgery a little in England. In case of an injury to the body nature constantly sends a new supply of blood to build up and resist. So it is with Mar Chica. You think perhaps that we Moors have sent an army to fight the Spaniards, and that upon the outcome of the contest between the two armies depends the fate of Mar Chica. Such is not the case. Our fighting force is constantly changing year by year, month by month, day by day even. Every day new fighters come and old ones leave. They come from the far south, from along the French-Algerian border, from over the entire country. They come and stay as long as they can, fight the Spaniards and then go back home, perhaps to return again and again.

"Largely it is a question of crops. When the crops are in they come and fight; when the crops must be harvested they go and harvest them, and then return. Such was the manner, I think, in which the wars of old were fought, wars which consumed a hundred years or more. It is more than warfare, it is that Morocco constantly sends new blood to the scene of her wound. She has done it for generations—she can do it for generations more. Is that all you wish to know, sir?"

"You do not think, then," demanded Lee, "that the Mar Chica district will be—what do you say, pacified?—so that the mineral resources can be developed?"

"Not in your lifetime—nor in mine," answered Hassan positively.

"And you think that if I, for example, were to combine forces with the Duke de las Torres——"

Lee became suddenly aware of a feeling that he was making unduly free concerning his business with a Moorish servant, and did not complete his question. But the young man answered, nevertheless:

"By combining with the duke you will undoubtedly guarantee the killing of more thousands of us," he said, "and of an equal number of ignorant Spanish boys who are drafted for Moroccan service. You will share in what small output the duke now has from his holdings—and that output will not be increased in this generation. Besides which—I speak frankly and truthfully, sir—besides which there will not only be a price on your head, for which perhaps you are too brave to care, but you will never be able to develop the concession which you recently secured in the Province of Zemmur."

Lee grunted with sudden surprize. He had completely forgotten that he held the concession for a rich Moroccan province.

"And furthermore," concluded Hassan, "I believe that you will find, if you do not already know, that conditions in Spain are such as to make highly speculative an investment with the duke. I refer, of course, to the unrest which is prevalent in Spain. If a leader should arise to unite the masses, then there would no longer be a throne, and the now powerful Duke de las Torres would have taken from him the power which he now gains from the king alone. And the effect upon the investment would be the same in case—in case the duke were to die or be killed. He is a strong man; his associates are weaklings."

Emperor Lee stared fixedly for a moment at this surprizing Berber. He himself had made a careful investigation of that very problem—the problem of the duke's assistants—and had found them as described by Hassan. All depended upon the duke. This, of course, was the way of the business world, a strong man always led weaker ones. But now the insecurity of the whole structure which the duke had reared became more evident—even though the case was presented by a mere servant of Mohamed Ali. However—well, one always must take a chance on death. If he himself should die, no doubt his own commercial structure would suffer. This thought gave rise to another, and to a question.

"I thank you," he said to Hassan. "And—" he hesitated a moment—"and do you really believe that if I refuse to back out of this business that your master, Mohamed Ali, will have me shot at sunset tomorrow?"

Sternness made Hassan's formerly pleasant features severe.

"I have not the slightest doubt, sir," he said, "that he will do so. Wherefore—" But apparently he reconsidered his impulse to advise.

"I will tell Sidi Mohamed that you desire to talk with him," he said, as he went out.

Emperor Lee started upon his supper, but his thoughts did not concern the food. They ran hither and thither, questioning, doubting, accepting and rejecting, affirming and denying, but always they came back to the same point. His business with the duke might not be a very good bet. In fact, it might be a bad one, but in Emperor Lee a voice insisted, insisted: you can't surrender, you can't surrender. Get out of it afterward if you want to, but you must not be forced out. Perhaps it was pride—and perhaps it was just plain Yankee stubbornness. And besides, the voice added, Mohamed Ali won't shoot you. It is inconceivable. But doubt raised its head: many other things had been inconceivable in this weird country—but they had been true.

Mohamed Ali came just as Lee finished eating, and with him came Hassan to take away the tray. The big outlaw, after greeting his captive, squatted cross-legged upon the rug he had brought with him folded over his arm, and waited in silence for Lee to open the conversation. The American rose slowly, stretched his arms and legs as though his unaccustomed sitting had cramped them, and then took the three paces necessary to bring him to the door of the small room. Hassan, going out, had left it slightly ajar.

"You do not object if I close this? I have business with you which I do not wish others to hear, and one of your men may be near." Mohamed Ali nodded carelessly.

Emperor Lee thrust the door firmly in place and then, with a quick movement of his foot, unobserved by Mohamed Ali, he slid into the inch-wide crack beneath the door a wedge he had spent hours fashioning out of a piece of wood he had found in his prison, with only a nail file, sharpened with great caution upon the stone wall, as a tool. That very strength of the door which would keep him in was now turned in his favor to keep others out, although of the two plans he had in mind, the first and best—the one for which he greatly desired success—did not anticipate attack upon the door. He went swiftly toward Mohamed Ali; it was now, for a little while at least, man to man.

Mohamed Ali saw him coming, saw the change upon his bearded face, saw the light of battle in his eyes and rose to meet him. Lee had covered the distance from the door with three long strides—and an unuttered prayer that Mohamed Ali would not see him—would not guess the situation in time to cry out.

But if there was a vast amount of pride or stubbornness in the big American, there was no less in him who was known as Mohamed Ali. He could have shouted for aid—and Lee knew that he had not noted the wedge beneath the door—but he made no sound, merely sprang erect with a single graceful motion despite his big body, and as Lee flung himself upon him, seized the American in his powerful arms.

For a moment they stood thus like a living statue, their faces scarcely six inches apart, looking into each other's eyes with an intensity almost electric. Then, slowly, Mohamed Ali's right arm slid up Lee's breast towards the neck and his left arm crept towards his waist at the back. His muscles filled with force as steam is turned into an engine, and the big American's spine began to bend.

Slowly Mohamed Ali bent him backward, with a constantly increasing power which Lee recognized as being greater than his own strength. Fortunately he had anticipated this; had realized that his opponent, through his manner of life must possess greater force, greater endurance, than he.

But strength was not everything. Emperor Lee abruptly relaxed his muscles, as though in surrender. The hand of Mohamed Ali sprang swiftly from shoulder to throat. Lee, as he sank, turned over as though to avoid the clutching fingers. And then Mohamed Ali's wrist was seized in powerful hands, with lightning-like speed his arm was jerked over the left shoulder of the now stooping American and from beneath him the American's body gave a vast surge which lifted him clear while the hands upon his wrist pulled him forward with terrific force. Mohamed Ali swung over Lee's head and crashed to the floor, where he lay motionless.

For a few deep breaths Lee stood looking down upon his defeated opponent. Luck had been with him. Luck and a little knowledge of jiu-jitsu, for which he thanked whatever gods might be interested in the proceedings. Then swiftly he tore the turban from Mohamed Ali's fez, which had come off in the struggle, tied the outlaw's hands and feet, gagged him securely against utterance, and dragged the big body over to his own mattress. Thus far, he reflected, fortune had walked at his elbow—but a greater risk was still to be faced; he now had to walk to liberty through Mohamed Ali's stronghold—and appear to be Mohamed Ali himself.

XV

WHILE Emperor Lee had been discussing various matters with Hassan the English-speaking Berber, two horsemen — or more strictly speaking, mulemen, for they rode the more plebian but sure-footed animals—drew rein for a moment on the rocky trail a little distance from the hill upon which sat Mohamed Ali's stronghold.

The second of the riders—a misshapen, bearded figure whose grotesque hump was visible in the starlight, rode up beside the now motionless Travers, and they watched a little yellow light crawling along the hill-top.

"That," murmured Bartolo Vasquez, chief of the Spanish secret service, and now acting the rôle of servant to the American, "is Zinat, Mohamed Ali's fortress."

"Yes," assented Travers, "I have seen it before, but in daylight. Always looked mighty impregnable to me."

"But there is a secret entrance," said the hunch-back, and his words had the tone of a repeated statement. "And I know where it is."

"I have not changed my opinion, nevertheless," said Travers. "To gain access to the stronghold through a secret passageway would defeat our purpose—or at best put us in a position where we would have to take desperate chances on making our own escape, to say nothing of rescuing Lee. No, Señor Bartolo, it is possible that we may use your secret passage for our exit—but not for our entrance. For that there is only one method—for me to approach the gate and boldly demand admittance to the presence of one who was once my friend, Mohamed Ali. Whether or not I may be able to influence him remains to be seen."

"I would not trust him far," asserted the hunch-back. "Not I."

"Nor I either," answered Travers, a little bitterness in his tone, "if I were an enemy of his country. You are satisfied that he does not know of your presence in Morocco, that he does not know the identity of the hunchbacked Jew who has been seen in Tangier and in Arzila? He has an excellent secret service of his own."

Bartolo Vasquez snorted softly with contempt.

"I think my disguise may be called perfect," he replied. "Also I think you need have no fear for me. I have not played this game for more than half your lifetime without learning how to take care of myself."

There was in his voice a tone which nettled Travers, which struck mute further argument. He himself was very far from satisfied that Mohamed Ali was in ignorance of anything that had taken place; from past experience he knew that the outlaw chieftain not only was a man of marvelous acumen, with an almost countless number of contacts with people with whom it would naturally be supposed he was not in touch at all, but also that he had a small but efficient army of spies scattered throughout the northern part of the country. To assume that Mohamed Ali was ignorant of any particular fact was quite similar to assuming that a buzz-saw in action is harmless because one cannot see its teeth. But the self-confidence, the egotism, of Bartolo Vasquez placed Travers in the position of offering advice to a much older and presumably much wiser man than himself—hence he remained silent.

Furthermore, he reflected, the Spaniard, as the friend and representative of the duke could be no friend in this affair. True, they had joined forces in the present situation—but only because Travers once more had placed Lee's life ahead of Morocco's good. He realized thoroughly that should they succeed in rescuing Lee from Mohamed Ali's hands he would then have to fight with equal bitterness to prevent Bartolo from carrying him off in triumph to Spain, there to consummate the deal with the Duke de las Torres.

The thought flashed through his mind—as unwelcome thoughts will—that his own problem might be simpler did Mohamed Ali chance to know of the presence in Morocco of the disguised Spaniard. But he put this thought away swiftly in face of an unpleasant picture which rose before his eyes: if Bartolo were captured in Mohamed Ali's stronghold there would shortly be need of a new chief of the Spanish secret service. He touched spurs to his mount and rode forward along the path which climbed the hill and shortly, dismounting, hammered upon the closed gateway with his riding crop, the Jew holding both mules, as a servant would do.

A little postern in the gate flew open and a bearded face peered out.

"*Schoon ja?*" demanded the voice.

"Tell your master, Mohamed Ali," commanded Travers in Arabic, "that his friend, Sidi Travers, desires admittance."

"Approach that I may see," requested the voice, and a candle lantern was thrust through the little opening, and into its light Travers stepped and stood. The bearded face looked and nodded, withdrew the lantern and threw open the gate. The American recognized the native as one he had encountered before.

"Enter," invited the guard. "My master is occupied at the moment. When he comes forth I will tell him of your coming. In the meantime—" He turned upon the Jew. His voice grew harsh as he spoke to one of the despised race. "Take you the mules to the stables—down that road—and see that they are properly cared for. And you, Sidi—" he turned again to face Travers. "No doubt you are tired, and perhaps hungry. If you will come with me I will see that you are furnished food and a place to rest until my master is at liberty."

Travers followed him across the big square which formed the center of the stronghold and, at the guard's invitation, sat down upon a little mattress in front of one of the houses.

"This," explained the guard, "is my own dwelling, and immediately my woman shall serve you." He went within and Travers heard him giving orders to the woman. In a moment he returned. "I must return to my post," he explained. "But very soon food will be prepared."

Travers thanked him and watched him shuffle across the square and back to the gate. Then he lighted a cigaret and grew reflective. He was inside Mohamed Ali's stronghold, as was also Bartolo. He had little doubt that Lee was also behind one of those sturdy closed doors of which so many were visible from where he sat. A fool's errand, maybe, this one that he had come upon. Yet it was the only course open to him. A Moorish woman, covering her face modestly and discreetly with her *haik*, came bearing a lantern, which she hung on a peg in the doorway so that its light fell about Travers. And speedily she came again and again bearing food which she placed upon the cobbled area-way where he sat. Travers fell to with a zest. The trail had made him hungry, and the tantalizing odor of *kesk'soo* and mutton added to his appetite.

But a few minutes had passed when a figure approached through the darkness and came to a halt just outside the fringe of light.

"Is there anything that the Sidi desires?" wailed a voice which Travers recognized at once as that of Bartolo. "The mules are fed and otherwise cared for. Is there aught else?"

"No, that is all," replied Travers in a voice of assumed brusqueness. "Sit you there and when I have eaten I will see that you have food also."

But Travers was destined never to finish that particular supper. A door on the side of the square across from him—a distance of perhaps a hundred yards—opened sufficiently to let a big figure pass through the yellow light which flowed from the room. Even at that distance Travers recognized, he was sure, the figure of Mohamed Ali. And as the figure was swallowed up by the darkness he noted that the hunch-back had disappeared. Travers looked towards the gate where the guard sat beside the lantern, and reflected that very probably when Mohamed Ali reached the gate, in which direction he appeared to be headed, the guard would give him his message.

The door across the square had not quite closed; a strip of light perhaps six inches wide still showed. Travers, watching it idly, was startled by the realization that the strip of yellow was growing in width, slowly but surely. And then he saw on the ground, a black shadow creeping gradually into the light. As he watched, wondering, the shadow withdrew. He had taken not half a dozen bites when the hunch-backed Jew came swiftly out of the darkness to his side.

"I am hungry, and would eat," wailed the Jew. Then, in swift English, "Señor Lee is in that room, bound and gagged. I go to release him."

Travers started to command that he should do no such thing—to tell him that he would have the fortress about their ears, but the Jew had darted away. With an irritated exclamation Travers rose and crossed the square, hoping to overtake the hunch-back. But before he reached the spot he saw the door open again very slowly, saw a dark shadow wriggle through on hands and knees. He suppressed a curse. What could they accomplish here among Mohamed Ali's men, in Mohamed Ali's stronghold, even the three of them? Then he recalled Bartolo's story of the secret passageway. Useless. They would all be killed before they could cross the square. Yet no doubt this is what the Spaniard had in mind—to release Lee, make a surprize break for the passageway and then, on foot, to reach swift horses which they had secreted around the shoulder of a hill.

There was no time for further thought. Travers stepped inside the room, swinging the door closed behind him. Bartolo apparently had been right. In the candle light, which seemed much dimmer inside the room than when viewed from the darkness, Travers saw the picture of the hunch-back learning over the big, brown bearded man who lay upon the mattress, his face partly covered by the *koob* of his *sulham*. A knife flashed in the Spaniard's hands as he severed the ropes which bound the recumbent figure. Then, like a cyclone loosed, the big man sprang to his feet, seized the Spaniard by the throat, lifted him from his feet and flung him with terrific force against the wall. There was a sickening sound as Bartolo's head struck the rocks, a sickening cry as he fell in a grotesque heap upon the floor. Travers for one amazed moment stared horror-struck. Had Lee gone insane? He had killed Bartolo! But now he turned full face toward Travers, and with a feeling that the earth had fallen away beneath him, Travers stared back into the face, not of his friend Emperor Lee, but of Mohamed Ali.

A big arm thrust him aside as Mohamed Ali made for the door, flung it open.

"*Fien al nasrini. Fien al nasrini!*" His great voice bellowed across the square. There came echoing shouts, the sound of doors flung hurriedly open, the running of slippers. "The Christian! The American! Where is he?" roared Mohamed Ali. "Search! Find him! Do not kill him but bring him to me. He cannot have escaped!" He went swiftly toward the gate where the guard now stood holding his lantern and peering about as though the American might be lurking at his very heels.

"No one has gone forth, Sidi," said the guard as Mohamed Ali came up. "That would be impossible, Two have come in, Sidi Travers, whom I know to be your friend, and his Jewish servant."

"Jewish servant?" repeated Mohamed Ali in wrath. "Bartolo Vasquez, of Spain! Nevertheless, he is dead, so it matters not. Go and join in the search for this other American."

Emperor Lee, hiding in a dark corner of the fortress wall, endeavoring to find foothold for his bare feet, heard the bellows of Mohamed Ali and knew that his plans had miscarried. He gained a toe-hold and lifted himself a little way up the wall, groping for another hold. Two more and he could reach the top. Oh, for a little time! He would pay for time as time never had been paid for before! His fingers found another crack in the rocky wall. He dragged himself up and again found a little projection. Once more—he reached for the top of the wall.

Then a dark figure flung itself at him shouting shrilly, seized him by the leg and pulled him down. The native's cry brought others, two, three, half a dozen, to the scene, and in a moment "Emperor" Lee was escorted by a shouting group back to the square where Mohamed Ali awaited him.

XVI

TRAVERS, from the doorway of the room wherein lay the thing which had once been Bartolo Vasquez, chief of King Alfonso's secret service, had watched the scurrying about, had listened to the shouting, and now saw Emperor Lee, with four men holding him, come into the circle of light which surrounded Mohamed Ali. He was not being led, was not resisting, but was walking swiftly, so that his captors seemed to be dragging behind him rather than leading him. He heard Mohamed Ali give a gruff command that Lee be confined in a certain room and guarded, and saw the command executed. And then he saw the big outlaw turn toward him and approach with determination in his stride.

"Now for it," murmured Travers.

Turning into the room he cast a glance of aversion at the little mound in one corner—he had thrown a blanket over the huddled form of Bartolo—and seated himself upon a cushion. Travers was in very much of a mess, and knew it; and despite the fact that Bartolo was beyond this earth's intrigue and perplexities and dangers, there was no possibility of overlooking the fact that the present unpleasant, dangerous situation, was due entirely to the Spaniard's conceit.

With him Travers had argued at length and in vain against his coming to Zinat, at first because of the great danger to which he felt Bartolo would be subjecting himself; afterward in the endeavor to avoid being himself involved in that danger. But before Bartolo's conceit his first series of arguments had been brushed away: Bartolo was assured, not only of the perfection of his disguise, but that his presence in Morocco was suspected by no one.

Had Travers known nothing of the stubbornness of Spanish conceit once it is aroused, he would have learned from Bartolo. In self defense, then, he switched to the argument that, were Bartolo to be discovered—precisely as he had been—his own position would be full of peril. How could he explain to Mohamed Ali—without lying—the presence of this enemy of Morocco in Zinat, posing as his own servant? And even a lie, he reflected, had but one chance in a million for success. He might tell Mohamed Ali that he was unaware of the hunch-back's identity—but if Mohamed Ali should be aware that this was a falsehood, the situation would become much more menacing, if that were possible. And that Mohamed Ali all along had been aware of the hunch-back's identity seemed obvious; it was, therefore, extremely probable, Travers reflected, that the big outlaw was equally well aware that he, Travers, had not been under any illusions concerning the Jew.

Travers dismissed the thought of falsehood with a shrug, realizing that he would not have lied to Mohamed Ali, even had it promised to accomplish good instead of evil, reflected idly for a second, upon the ability of the human mind to consider acts which intelligence, reason, or conscience would not permit committed. No—his decision came in a flash—the only hope now for himself, as well as for Emperor Lee, lay in absolute honesty, straight words, with Mohamed Ali, who held the fate of them both in his strong hands.

He drew his pistol from its holster; slid it along the floor. It came to rest almost in the middle of the room. Scarcely had he done this when Mohamed Ali bulked in the doorway and fixed narrowed eyes upon him. Travers, returning the gaze, rose from his seat. Mohamed Ali stepped into the room and the toe of his slipper came in contact with the pistol upon the floor. He glanced down to see what his toe had struck; hands upon hips he studied the gun a moment, then looked at Travers in silence.

"Mine," said the American—not in answer to any particular question in Mohamed Ali's eyes, but because he had anticipated this moment, had planned for the occasion whereby he might indicate to Mohamed Ali before any discussion started, that he was unarmed.

The outlaw raised his eyebrows in an expression which could have meant any one of a number of things, slid the pistol aside with his slipper toe and put to Travers the question which Travers had known would come at once.

"Do you know who this thing was?" demanded Mohamed Ali, pointing at the covered figure in the corner.

"He was," replied Travers without hesitation, "Bartolo Vasquez, chief of the Spanish secret service."

"Then," demanded Mohamed Ali, his face settling into hard lines. "Then why did you bring him here as your servant?"

"He accomplished little," observed Travers, "except to release you and thereby, perhaps, keep Lee your prisoner."

Mohamed Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"And," Travers continued, "I should say that he paid in full for his temerity in coming into Mohamed Ali's stronghold."

"That is not the point," declared Mohamed Ali. "The point is that you brought him here—you who have posed as the friend of Mohamed Ali and Mohamed Ali's country."

Travers looked straight into the angry eyes of the outlaw.

"I cannot deny that I knew who he was," he said coldly, "but I can deny that I brought him with me. He was no weakling, Mohamed Ali, however much of your enemy he might have been. He dared, in the course of duty, to come here, believing that you would not recognize him. I feared—you see, I know more than he, perhaps, about Mohamed Ali—and I tried to dissuade him, but it was useless. He had no more fear than you have—but less judgment. And for that he has paid in full—while Mohamed Ali has one less enemy in the world."

For what seemed a long time the outlaw kept his eyes upon Travers' face. His expression of anger gave way to one of doubt, to one of reflection, and finally, it seemed to Travers, who held himself tight, knowing that the next few seconds were of vast importance, that the Moor's expression became less agitated.

"Nevertheless," said Mohamed Ali at length, "he would not have come without you. Wherefore you are to blame in that you made it possible for him to enter."

"He would have come anyhow," Travers declared.

"But he could not have entered," said Mohamed Ali.

"Perhaps you are wrong. He claimed to know of a secret entrance to Zinat."

Mohamed Ali started, and Travers knew that there was a secret entrance—whether Bartolo had known of it or not.

"Hmph!" exclaimed Mohamed Ali, covering his momentary confusion. "There is more than one perhaps, but they are often changed. Moreover, a rat can get into a trap but is not often able to get out."

Travers nodded assent to this aspect of the case.

"Nevertheless," continued Mohamed Ali, "I maintain that had you not come the Spaniard would not. He knew, as did you, that because you were—" He hesitated and changed the words in his mind—"because we had been friends on another occasion, you would find little difficulty in gaining access to my *casbah*."

"I had to come, Mohamed Ali," declared

Travers. "I greatly desired to come alone, but that was impossible. Bartolo assured me that if he did not accompany me he would follow. I felt no responsibility in the matter. I, myself, had to come."

"And why, is it permitted to ask?" Mohamed Ali's tone was malicious.

"Mohamed Ali is not the only man who fights for his friends," said Travers, and flushed a little, feeling that it sounded theatrical. "Sidi Lee was, and is, my friend," he added.

"And yet," retorted the outlaw, "if my information is correct, you gained his release from Miguel Belarbi only to hold him as your own prisoner."

"Yes," Travers agreed, "your information is correct. I assumed however, and I think that you will agree with me, Mohamed Ali, that friendship is capable of many variations. As a friend of Emperor Lee it was not only my duty but my desire to rescue him if I could from danger at the hands of Benito Bravo and Belarbi, just as it later became my duty and my desire to attempt to rescue him from the hands of Mohamed Ali."

"But why?" persisted the outlaw. "Why, when you had taken him from Belarbi and Benito, did you not send him at once to Tangier, to Gibraltar, out of harm's way?" A peculiar smile flickered around Mohamed Ali's eyes as he asked this question; a smile which changed to a look of surprize when Travers answered:

"That, Mohamed Ali, is, I think, a matter which does not concern you."

He could not tell this big brown man that he had intended forcing Emperor Lee to give up his connection with the Duke de las Torres. It would savor too much of an appeal to Mohamed Ali's own interests. A certain pride prevented him from that. And in Mohamed Ali's face the surprize gave way to an emotion which softened it somewhat, swept from the eyes the look of menace which had crinkled them. He folded his arms, gazed at the floor reflectively a moment, then met Travers' gaze and announced quietly:

"In that case, Sidi Travers, there is nothing more to be said. You have come of your own accord to Zinat, so that I now have two rats in my trap instead of one. What disposition I shall make of you—" he stopped to pick up the pistol from the floor and stick it into his belt—"remains to be seen. For the present your activities will be extremely limited. Understand," he shouted with sudden fierceness, "Mohamed Ali does not enjoy having his plans interfered with. He does not enjoy having a friend aid his enemies. These things you have done. The outcome is yet to be seen."

Travers bowed stiffly.

"I am Mohamed Ali's prisoner," he said coldly. "And what Mohamed Ali may do assuredly is beyond human calculation. Despite that," he went on bluntly, "what are you going to do about Mr. Lee?"

Mohamed Ali turned on his heel and strode to the door. Travers thought he was not going to answer the question. But as the threshold the big outlaw paused, turned and said:

"I am not going to do anything with Sidi Lee. But tomorrow at sunset he is to decide whether he is to continue to live or not. The situation is very simple; I myself am not concerned in it."

"You mean—you mean you are going to kill him if he doesn't give up his business with the duke?"

"No," contradicted Mohamed Ali, "that is not correct. Sidi Lee is going to decide the relative importance of two things—is going to decide whether he prefers to give up his interest in the Duke's business or to vote himself a sentence of death."

The door banged behind him. Travers heard rusty bolts shot into place, heard the rattle of rifles as guards took up their position outside the portal. Rats in a trap—and Emperor Lee facing death because of that proud stubbornness which had made him what he was, that could no more be ignored as an impelling factor than the desire for food. The association of ideas recalled to Travers' mind the body of the hunch-back in the corner. He strode swiftly to the door and beat upon it.

"Ho'. Mohamed Ali!" he called. "Mohamed Ali!"

From a distance the outlaw's voice reached him.

"Mohamed Ali listens."

"Will you not have the body of the Spaniard removed?" shouted Travers through the oaken door.

Harsh, deep laughter grated upon his ears.

"We will leave it there," shouted Mohamed Ali. "We will leave it there—as an object lesson."

Travers shuddered, remembering how,

upon a certain occasion, Mohamed Ali had confined an English newspaper-man for three days in a four-foot cell containing the remains of a man who was very, very dead. An object lesson, indeed!

XVII

TO Travers the night seemed endless—not a night but a chain of disconnected epochs or a series of incarnations separated by short periods of oblivion. Time lost its mechanical form—ceased to be measured by swings of a pendulum or other mechanical contrivance—and became as personal as his own heartbeats. He perceived for the first time with amazing clarity that time was relative, that every human being must have his own time factor as well as he must have his own personal speed of thought; furthermore, that, as thought could change its speed, so time too varied with the changing forces or circumstances. He perceived, with a little bewilderment, that time was too personal a thing to be measured either by ticks of a dollar mechanism, or by the circling earth, or by the movement of the stars in their progress through infinity. He had never before thought of time save as a measure of action or inaction; strange, he reflected, that it should be considered so purely a mechanical measure. It wasn't that at all—or at least it was not only that; how could a measure of action be applied to define thought and spirit, to weigh the lightnings of the intelligence and the soul?

The coming of a purple dawn found him, so far as any workable plan was concerned, precisely where he had been before the endless night had fallen. He knew Mohamed Ali; knew the outlaw's lack of fear; although a dozen governments should seek vengeance, Mohamed Ali could conceive of no act more fatal than that which Emperor Lee had taken in joining hands with the duke. He knew a thing of which Lee apparently had been kept in ignorance—that the Duke de las Torres lived surrounded by a bodyguard, that he rarely left his own castle, and that he had not ventured into Morocco for twenty years. Furthermore that, despite his precautions a knife had reached him once, and bullets twice.

Travers reflected that probably the duke had taken it for granted that Lee would understand the situation well enough not to think of going to Morocco, or else he had feared to frighten the American out of the business. He wondered whether he had not been a good deal of a fool to put his head into the same bag with Emperor Lee's, wondered if he would have done better to stay in Tangier and to arouse the world on Lee's behalf.

It would have been easy to do so; a brief announcement would have brought the governments of the United States and Spain roaring into the affair; yes, and France and other European powers as well. But he could not have given this word until he was certain that Emperor Lee was actually a prisoner, not without running the risk of appearing ridiculous. Then things had happened too swiftly; Lee had fallen into the hands of a man to whom government meant little; Mohamed Ali would have killed the American just as surely—and perhaps more surely—had the United States and Spain sent their warships to Tangier harbor.

Furthermore, such an appeal to government not only would have failed to accomplish the release of Emperor Lee, but it would have been a serious blow to Moroccan independence. Even for his friend, Travers saw now, he could not have taken such a step. He was glad to feel, however, that it would have been useless.

And now the dawn of a new day had come; of that day when Emperor Lee must master his stubborn heart or die. When he, Travers, might also be called upon to face that supreme moment of surprize which connects life with death. Unless——

One tiny, pitiful chance, a possibility so infinitesimal that the word was too strong for it. It was not a chance at all, because chance is a mathematical equation in which one factor bears some relation to the other. Yet, tenuous as the gossamer filament of a spider's web, it was all that sustained his hope. The Black Magician—the Master of the Djinnoon.

He who was, perhaps, a representative of that vast secret power of Islam known as "the Hand of Allah," that power which emanated from none knew where, but penetrated to every nook and cranny of the eastern world.

That every move in the tragedy which had engulfed Emperor Lee, had moved him so swiftly from his known world into an unknown one, had sped him irresistibly on his way to the rifles of Mohamed Ali's men—

that every move was known to the Hand of Allah, Travers had not the slightest doubt. And that the Black Magician was a powerful member of this organization was unquestionable. Just how powerful he had never been able to judge. But that the Hand would move in the present situation he gravely doubted—disbelieved; by no possible effort of his imagination could he conceive of good and sufficient reason for Mohamed Ali's program to be opposed.

Lee had made himself a menace to Morocco, wherefore the powers of Islam unquestionably should desire his elimination. Even had he not come to Morocco such would have been the case. But having come, having with amazing ignorance walked into the hands of his newly made enemies, the consummation of the tragedy had been given swift wings. But that, in international politics, international intrigue, always there are such wheels within wheels, that the wisest of the players of the game discount certainty. One fact stood out most clearly in Travers' mind; only one factor could have influence in Emperor Lee's predicament.

That factor was the Hand of Allah. An inimical, menacing factor, without doubt, a factor whose desires must be sympathetic toward the intentions of Mohamed Ali; but if two enemies are lost in the desert, and one only has water, there is nothing to be done by the other except to appeal to his enemy. The Hand of Allah could do no worse than Mohamed Ali was bent upon doing. And for this reason Travers had taken the one tiny chance—it seemed now that it was like shooting a rifle at the milky way in the hope of hitting one particular star of the untold billions—and had sent from Arzila, by Mustapha, a message to the Black Magician.

He had sent this message when he had learned from the hunch-back that Emperor Lee had fallen into the hands of the natives, presumably of Mohamed Ali; had sent it when he had not realized fully the tragedy which was to threaten; had sent it with more hope than he now had, thinking that perhaps some force could be brought to bear upon Mohamed Ali—even upon Emperor Lee—to straighten out the tangle.

But now he experienced grave doubts that the message would even be delivered. Mustapha unquestionably would give it first to Hadj Hamed—and probably that would be the end of it. Hadj Hamed, he knew, was as much of a patriot as Mohamed Ali. Even supposing that Hadj Hamed permitted passage of the message, it might arrive too late. The Black Magician might be out of town—or most probable of all, he would refuse to interfere. Even if he should not refuse, any action he took might be too late. Travers watched the narrowing of the yellow streak beneath his door which told him that the sun was climbing in the east; time was on wing.

A servant brought him breakfast, and to his surprize addressed him in English. The man was Hassan, with whom Lee had held his surprizing conversation the preceding day. In reply to Travers' inquiry, Hassan told him that Mohamed Ali had ridden forth at dawn to shoot wild boar—and that he would not return until sunset.

"Is it permitted that I see my friend, Sidi Lee?" asked Travers.

"For what purpose?" demanded the servant.

"Perhaps," replied Travers, "he could be induced to reconsider this matter that has got him into trouble."

"You mean his negotiations with the Duke de las Torres?" asked Hassan.

Travers glanced up at him in some surprize.

"I have the honor to be in Mohamed Ali's confidence," added Hassan gravely.

"In that case," observed Travers, "perhaps you will appreciate the necessity of urging Mr. Lee to change his mind."

Hassan shrugged his shoulders in a gesture combining both skepticism and indifference.

"Can you change the disposition of a mule," he asked. "The other way is much easier—and certain."

"You actually believe that, otherwise, Mr. Lee will be shot?" He knew the answer to his question before he had uttered it.

"Why not?" retorted Hassan. "The matter is in his own hands. The choice is his."

"There will be retribution, without doubt," pointed out Travers. "The United States government——"

Hassan permitted himself a little smile of amusement.

"And the Spanish government also, no doubt," he agreed. "But as the Spanish government has already more trouble in Morocco than it can take care of—" He dismissed the subject with another shrug, and continued. "As for the American government, will any action not be rather late—so far as Mr. Lee is concerned?"

"I was thinking of Mohamed Ali," Travers pointed out.

A smile now crinkled Hassan's face.

"Mohamed Ali," he said, "is, I believe, quite able to take care of himself. Your government will only make demands upon the Sultan for the punishment of Mohamed Ali. In view of the fact that His Majesty has made every effort for more than a year to capture Mohamed Ali—and for reasons much more potent than that Mohamed Ali had rendered him a service such as he would render him by killing such an enemy of the empire as Mr. Lee—it seems scarcely probable that any immediate retribution will fall upon my master. If the Sultan can not catch Mohamed Ali in order to punish him—and assuredly he would not greatly desire to do so—what can your government do?"

Travers put a period to the subject; there was no use in being told things which he knew as well as did his informant.

"Can I talk with Mr. Lee?" he asked.

"I will let you talk with him through the window of his room," agreed Hassan, "when you have finished breakfast."

In fulfilment of this promise, Travers stood, half an hour later, at a little window facing on the big court of Mohamed Ali's stronghold, and greeted Emperor Lee. But the conversation was short and discouraging. Emperor Lee returned the briefest and gruffest replies to Travers' greetings and inquiries as to how he felt, and cut off in the middle Travers' first tentative arguments for reconsideration of the Spanish business. Apparently Lee had not weakened; stubbornness filled him, blinded him.

"Go away," he broke in upon Travers' argument. "Let them shoot and be —— to 'em. Any time a bunch of outlaws think they're going to tell me what to do, they're going to learn something. Shoot? Shoot, ——! They won't dare. Beat it. I don't want to listen."

Travers, for a little while, had persisted, presenting the case as he saw it, trying to impress upon Emperor Lee the inevitability of his execution unless he changed his attitude; but after he had talked for ten minutes, twenty minutes, without even a grunt of reply from Lee, he gave it up sorrowfully and returned to his own quarters, convinced that he had made no impression upon his fellow American; equally convinced that Lee would pay with his life for his folly.

The day passed, marked only by his midday meal. The sun sank to the tops of the western hills; there was a clattering of horses' hoofs as Mohamed Ali rode into his stronghold; a holy man uttered the call to *moghreb* prayer—and from the north a huge negro, wrapped in voluminous black sateen garments, urged a white mule along the road which led to Mohamed Ali's stronghold.

XVIII

SUNSET. Mohamed Ali rose from the crimson prayer rug upon which he had knelt in worship, and gave swift commands.

Very quickly there came to him from one direction a man leading a saddled horse, and from another three men, stepping together, and bearing rifles.

"Follow me," ordered Mohamed Ali, and strode to the door of Emperor Lee's quarters.

The guard threw open the portal. The bulky figure of the American filled the doorway. His hair was tousled, his face was flushed, and in his eyes was the angry gleam of an animal at bay—a big brown bear, cornered. No sign of surrender; the battle signals were flying.

Mohamed Ali, his face a mask, motioned first to the saddled horse, then to the three natives standing with their rifles at rest.

"The time for you to render decision is here," said Mohamed Ali. "The moment in which you must choose between horse or rifles. I await your decision." He bowed, formally, courteously, coldly.

The bloodshot eyes of Emperor Lee looked from Mohamed Ali to the saddled horse, from the horse to the armed soldiers—and back to Mohamed Ali again. If he thought to find in the outlaw's face any indication that the affair was merely a bluff, his hopes were disappointed. The outlaw's eyes were stern and unwavering, his features sadly serious. Again Emperor Lee's gaze rested upon the saddled horse. Mohamed Ali, noting the look, played a high card.

"If you should choose the horse," he said quietly, "your friend rides with you."

Emperor Lee turned his face again to the outlaw.

"I have no friends," he said. "But you mean Monsieur Travers?"

Mohamed Ali nodded assent.

"And otherwise?" questioned Lee.

"Otherwise—he does not ride," announced Mohamed Ali.

For a space the American stared over Mohamed Ali's shoulder into the gathering purple mist upon the hills. Thus while one might have slowly counted thirty—half a minute perhaps. But it was another occasion upon which time became purely relative; days passed in Emperor Lee's universe while he drew a dozen breaths. At last he drew his gaze from the distant hills and turned it again upon the waiting horse.

"In that case," he said slowly, paused, and darted a quick look at Mohamed Ali. Then his eyes narrowed, his jaw set. He had thought he heard a sigh of relief, and his quick glance had detected in Mohamed Ali's face a relaxation of the muscles. Emperor Lee was somewhat famed among his friends as a poker player. Like a flash of lightning he changed his decision; Mohamed Ali was bluffing, had thought that the game was won and by an almost imperceptible action had betrayed himself. Now, thought Emperor Lee, for the raise which would call that bluff.

"In that case—" he repeated, but his words were now sharp and quick, "Mr. Travers must take care of himself. I will not give my word. I will not ride."

Mohamed Ali stiffened. He uttered a command and the servant holding the horse led the animal away. Another command and the three men leveled their rifles at the American, while the one who had been serving as guard at the doorway, pushed past Lee into the room and then thrust him out, up against the very muzzles of the waiting guns.

"Forward!" commanded Mohamed Ali.

Emperor Lee smiled grimly, threw his great shoulders back and strode ahead in the direction indicated by the rifles prodding his back. Melodrama. Farce. He wondered, now that he had called the outlaw's bluff, how Mohamed Ali could keep from looking foolish. Probably the outlaw thought that when the no-doubt unloaded rifles were finally aimed at his breast, he would weaken—thought that there was yet one more bluff before the game was ended.

They passed through the gate of the fortress and turned to one side. There the rifles backed Emperor Lee up against the stone wall. The rifle-men stepped backward half a dozen paces, threw open the breech blocks of their rifles, took cartridges from their ammunition belts, thrust them into place and snapped back the bolts. The American watched with a face growing hard and a little white. Then through the gate came Travers, accompanied by the servant Hassan.

"For God's sake, Lee," shouted Travers. "Are you crazy? Are you mad? What would all the mines in the world be worth to you with a bullet in your heart?"

"Bah!" It was almost a snarl. "They won't shoot."

Travers stopped some three paces from Lee, stared at him with open mouth and wide eyes.

"They—won't—shoot?" he stammered. "You—you really believe that?"

It was inconceivable! The thought flashed through Travers' mind that Lee must have gone insane. Surely stubbornness, pride, call it what you would, could not so utterly blind a man to facts. And the thought of insanity gave him an idea; among the Mohammedans, he knew, the insane person is looked upon with respect, never harmed because in his head Allah is supposed to dwell. He turned swiftly to Mohamed Ali.

"The man is crazy," he said bluntly. "Absolutely insane. It is manifest that no man would die for such a reason. Is that not true? And if such be the case—you can't kill him—you can't."

But his plea fell flat.

"He is no more crazy than I am," replied Ali with sure understanding. "He thinks that this is a game which he will win. He thinks that I am not speaking the truth, that my men will not shoot. Shortly he will realize his mistake." He spoke to Lee. "You have, I believe, a daughter in Tangier. If there is any message you wish to send her I shall see that she receives it." He waited for Lee's reply, but none came.

"Very well," he continued. "That is all then, unless you desire to bid your friend farewell." He gestured to Travers.

Travers strode forward and put his hand upon Lee's shoulder. There were tears in his eyes.

"Can't I—can't I convince you," he stammered, "that you are making a terrible mistake? This—this isn't any pretense. This— My God!—this is—death!"

For the first time an expression of doubt, of indecision—perhaps of bewilderment appeared upon Lee's face.

"I—I can't believe it, Travers," he said slowly. "I can't—and I won't. Why—why it's inconceivable! It's well done—but he wouldn't dare."

"But I tell you," said Travers, choking, "that it is true—that he would dare. My God! Think of your daughter—" He got no further. Mohamed Ali pulled him back with a heavy hand and gave a command to the rifle-men. The rifles flew to position, bearing upon the broad breast of Emperor Lee. Travers, his face graying, turned away.

And then from behind a huge clump of cactus cantered a white mule bearing a big black figure—cantered between Emperor Lee and the menacing rifles and stopped. No word was uttered. The rifle-men lowered their guns and looked at one another with surprize; Emperor Lee peered in a bewildered way from the rider to Mohamed Ali and back to the rider again; Mohamed Ali stared with puzzled face at the big figure; and Travers, feeling the suspense, in the quick hope that Lee had surrendered—turned to observe. He saw then the big black figure, looking at Mohamed Ali, shake his head slowly from side to side, then swing from the big saddle and hand the reins to one of the rifle-men. His heart leaped, hurt him with its big throb of relief and hope. The Black Magician—the Master of the Djinnoon—had come, had ridden with seeming foreknowledge of events, with uncanny timeliness, between the impatient bullets and the heart of Emperor Lee. Powerful as Mohamed Ali might be, here was one more powerful still. His coming meant a reprieve at least.

In something of a haze Travers noted that the Black Magician and Mohamed Ali, having withdrawn a little, were engaged in earnest conversation. Big as Mohamed Ali was, the Black Magician was bigger. He stood taller, and his bulk seemed vaster because of his voluminous sateen garments. His head and face had been modeled on broad lines, without skimping of material.

His was essentially a negro face, although every feature had been somewhat refined, perhaps as the result of a drop of Spanish or Arab blood. The lips were thinner, the eyes larger, the nose more Jewish, than in the pure blood negro; the black beard which swept around his face from temple to temple and across his upper lip was kinky. But had one been able to see beneath the red fez and its black turban which he wore, one would have seen that the short hair upon his head was black, but straight. Yes, unquestionably there was a drop or two of white blood in this man, Habib, who called himself sometimes the Black Magician and sometimes Master of the Djinnoon. Both titles had been conferred upon him, the first by the foreign residents of Tangier, who had been forced to believe in his magic, but who refused to swallow his claim that he was master of innumerable djinnoon, spirits, able to work both good and evil marvels at his command. And the latter title had been given him by the natives who accepted without question his claim of sovereignty over the djinnoon, and to this contributed his power of magic.

Watching Mohamed Ali and the black, Travers at last saw the outlaw shrug his shoulders and nod his head. Then the Black Magician turned, called to the man who was holding his mule to follow, and strode into the fortress. Mohamed Ali gave a command to the two remaining rifle-men, and to Lee a brief command to return with them to his quarters.

"And you also," he said to Travers.

Through the gathering darkness they reentered the stronghold, Lee and Travers to go to their respective rooms, Mohamed Ali to join the Black Magician and, with him to disappear within.

XIX

NIGHT fell swiftly—and with it came a scene which was to puzzle Travers for the remainder of his life. He was summoned to a big room wherein he found Mohamed Ali, the Black Magician and Emperor Lee. The room was lighted dimly by two big candles in brass candle-sticks a yard high. A Rabat carpet covered the floor and upon three sides of the otherwise unfurnished room were broad, thick cushions. On the cushions at one side, between the candles, sat Mohamed Ali and the Black Magician, squatting cross-legged. On the cushions along another edge of the room sat Emperor Lee.

"Sit there," commanded Mohamed Ali,

pointing to the cushion at that side of the room at his right hand, across from Lee.

Travers obeyed, wondering what was afoot. Was this to be in the nature of another trial for Emperor Lee, a trial before a higher tribunal than Mohamed Ali? He pulled some smaller cushions into place behind his back, and in doing so his hand came in contact with a folded paper. Idly he drew it from under the cushion and saw that it was a newspaper.

He was not surprized, for newspapers are not uncommon in Morocco. Mohamed Ali and the Black Magician were conversing in tones inaudible to him, and idly he glanced at the paper. The faint light of the candles rendered vision difficult, but he saw by the bold title that it was a French weekly which had considerable circulation in Tangier. Then he was a little surprized to note the date, that of the preceding day. Hmph! Probably the Black Magician had brought the paper with him. Travers laid it beside him, turning it over as he did so. Then from its gray blue three words in heavy type jumped up and struck him. He seized the periodical and squinting, read the few lines which constituted a last minute dispatch. The Duke de las Torres had been assassinated!

His heart pounded. This would make a vast difference. This would solve their problem. He knew Emperor Lee's opinions of the duke's associates. It was no longer possible for Lee to complete his negotiations with the duke. The hand of death had completed them. He wanted to shout the news to Lee, opened his mouth to do so—and was rendered silent by a sudden action on the part of Mohamed Ali.

"Come here," said the outlaw, addressing Lee.

Emperor Lee arose slowly and approached. Mohamed Ali threw a cushion upon the carpet in front of the Black Magician.

"Sit there," he ordered.

Somewhat awkwardly Lee sat, crossing his legs and drawing his feet up under him in the native custom—the only way that one can comfortably sit upon floor or cushion. The Black Magician drew the two candles nearer together, drew them to within a foot of Lee's face on either side. Lee watched him, a puzzled gleam in his eyes. Then the Black Magician took from one of the innumerable folds of his black garments a little silver kettle with three legs, which he placed with slow precision midway between himself and Lee.

From another fold of his cloak he drew forth a tiny box of silver, of about the size of his middle finger. As he unscrewed the cap of it Travers saw that a splendid ruby was set in and completely filled the top of the box. Into the little kettle the Black Magician poured from the jeweled box a little white powder, and then slowly replaced the cap with its blazing ruby. He did not lay aside the vial, but held it, so that it threw back, with a thousand red rays, the gleams of the candles, seemed to live as a fire lives, to blaze and sputter, seemed to dart like a searchlight into the eyes of Lee.

From beside him the Black Magician took a leather-bound book which he opened upon his knees. He turned the yellow pages slowly. They were covered with strange diagrams and written Arabic words. Having found the page he sought, he closed his eyes and began to mutter, while the ruby flashed its light toward Emperor Lee.

Travers leaned forward now in expectancy. What this business was he knew—the Black Magician was working magic, with the aid of his millions upon millions of djinnoon; he was talking to them now, summoning his spirits through the powerful cabalistic summons from his ancient book of magic.

But what was his purpose? To impress Lee? Travers dismissed the idea at once; he knew the Black Magician was too good a judge of human nature, too deeply learned in human psychology for this. And the duke was dead! The duke was dead! If he could only get the word to Lee. Impossible now; but later assuredly—after this weird business was finished, whatever it might be.

Suddenly Travers was startled to see a curl of purple smoke rise from the little silver kettle. He had not taken his eyes from the Magician, had scarcely blinked, and he knew that the black had not ignited the powder in the receptacle. The Magician's mutterings became louder, and Travers understood that he had commanded his djinnoon to ignite the contents of the kettle; that he now acknowledged this obedience to his orders. The curl of smoke grew larger, reached upward in a marvelously straight unbroken line to the ceiling. The ruby glowed more brilliantly, it seemed.

"Come now—come now—and obey my commands." The voice of the Black Magician strengthened and his glance followed the stream of smoke, which rose exactly between himself and Emperor Lee. As though it were a result of his command, the smoke stream suddenly broke in three places—precisely as though two invisible birds had darted through it. Then it arose uninterruptedly again. A queer odor pervaded the room, an odor which seemed to make it hard to breathe.

Travers found himself leaning forward, tense, breathing in little breaths, imbued by the feeling of strange things to come. He noted that Lee's face was set, expressionless, his eyelids dropped a little; saw that the Black Magician was staring with wide eyes at the smoke-stream at a point just on a line with his own eyes and those of the American. In one black hand the ruby burned viciously.

The silence seemed to deepen—and then as though manipulated by unseen hands the candles began to dim, like lamps turned down—until there was only a tiny gleam from each. The stare of the Black Magician was fastened upon the smoke-stream, or upon the eyes of the American beyond it. Then the smoke-stream suddenly shortened and expired, and the black eyes of the Magician—eyes in which little lightnings seemed to play—held those of Emperor Lee. Slowly a black hand raised the glittering ruby, then flashed it quickly upward in front of Lee's eyes, accompanied by a guttural cry.

Travers, staring at Emperor Lee, saw his eyes follow the flashing ruby—and then remain fixed with little more than the whites showing. The black reached swiftly forward and with stretched fingers closed Lee's eyelids. Then, with a little smile upon his big face, he relaxed, and with a black silken handkerchief wiped little drops of sweat from his face.

Travers also relaxed, feeling that he had been straining as in a race. But there was no magic in this, he thought to himself, except the magic of hypnotism. That Emperor Lee had fallen before the power of the Black Magician surprized him not at all; one who knows the east knows that there is no miracle, no supernatural power, in this. But now that Lee was under the influence of this hypnotic power, what did the Black Magician propose to do with him? The answer was quickly forthcoming.

In deep, measured voice the Black Magician began to speak. In Arabic. But Lee knew no Arabic, thought Travers. How then could he understand—how even could his subconscious mind understand the commands which the Master of the Djinnoon was issuing? Was it possible that the thought itself could be received regardless of the language in which it was uttered?

"Henceforth," the deep voice seemed to boom with suppressed power, "henceforth your business with the Duke de las Torres is finished. You will not join with him in his mining affairs, or any other. You cannot. You will not have the power to do so. My djinnoon control your actions in this respect. It is finished. Show me that you understand."

As though he were nodding in his sleep Lee's head bent forward twice, and from his lips came slowly, ponderously, the words—

"I—understand."

The Black Magician closed his own eyes for a moment and sat with bent head, pondering. At last he opened his eyes and spoke again.

"The Duke de las Torres is dead," he announced slowly.

"The—duke—is—dead," reiterated the sleeping Lee, spacing his words widely.

"And so all is finished."

"And—so—all—is—finished," repeated the American.

Ensued a space of silence. Then:

"Rise now, and go to your room. In five minutes you may awaken. Go."

Emperor Lee uncrossed his legs and rose slowly. Like a somnambulist he strode to the door, opened it and went into the night. Travers, watching him, concealed the newspaper hurriedly in his bosom. When Lee had disappeared, he turned and looked toward Mohamed Ali, and received from the outlaw a gesture of dismissal.

"Until the morning," said Mohamed Ali.

Travers rose and went out to inhale great lungfuls of the unscented air. His eyes were heavy, his head ached: that infernal smoke from the little silver kettle had been an opiate of some sort. He saw Lee entering his room, heard his door close behind him. He approached and tried the door but it was locked. He called to his friend but received no answer. And so he took from his bosom the French newspaper and slipped it between the iron bars at the window.

XX

WHEN Hassan brought Travers his breakfast next morning he also brought a message.

"My master," he said, "commands that you be ready to ride to Tangier with Mr. Lee in half an hour."

"I am ready now—except for breakfast," replied Travers promptly, but he was surprized. The fact that they were being released was sufficient indication that Lee had given his promise to keep out of the Spanish affair—or that no promise was now deemed necessary.

He ate hurriedly, mulling over the thought as he ate. Which was it? Would Lee actually find it impossible, because of a hypnotic prohibition, to go ahead with his business with the duke's associates—if he cared to do so? Had the duke's death changed his course? Had his hypnotic knowledge of the duke's death influenced him? Or had he given his word when he had read in the newspaper of the demise of his intended associate?

A servant brought a horse to his door, and Travers mounted, observing that by the gateway Lee was already in saddle, with Mohamed Ali and the Black Magician standing beside him. Travers joined them. Mohamed Ali gave him a straight look.

"There will be no further trouble," he said. "Ride swiftly." He grasped Traver's hand. "I forgive much that is done in the name of friendship," he said. "*Salaama.*"

Side by side Travers and Emperor Lee rode through the gateway. Where the road tumbled off the hill they turned to raise their hands in farewell to the Black Magician and Mohamed Ali, standing like sentinels at the gate.

For an hour they rode swiftly and in silence. Then their horses' pace slackened and they proceeded side by side. Travers was curious, wanted to ask questions—but somehow the questions would not formulate themselves to his satisfaction. Emperor Lee failed to break the silence. At last Travers put a statement and a question.

"I am leaving for New York on the next boat," he said. "Are you?"

"Of course," replied Lee. "Why not? This country doesn't attract me—much," he added with sarcasm.

"But—" Travers voiced the question with an effort: somehow it was like making a test which he feared to make— "But how about the duke?"

"Why—the duke is dead!" replied Lee, as though Travers' words had surprized him.

"Oh, you saw the newspaper I left for you, then?" remarked Travers.

"What newspaper?" Lee's tone was casual, and he did not look at Travers.

"Why I stuck a French newspaper in your window last night. It told of the duke's assassination. Didn't you see it?"

Lee gave a noncommital grunt, and a noncommital reply.

"I saw a newspaper under the window," he said, and added swiftly. "Of course the duke's death puts an end to all that business; his associates are worthless. It is finished."

Travers started at the words, words which the night before had come in such dead tones from Lee's lips: "It—is—finished."

"You know," he offered, and hesitated. "You know you were—hypnotized last night?"

Lee looked at him with an unreadable expression.

"Was I?" he asked. Then he laughed at Travers' startled face. "But," he said, "I saw that newspaper before you did."

"Did—did the Black Magician show it to you?" gasped Travers. "And was that hypnotism a—a scheme to—to save everybody's face? Or were you really——"

Emperor Lee smiled grimly into the startled and questioning eyes of Travers.

"That," he said, "is not for publication. Forget it! And tell me—how much money do you want for the hospital for that missionary of yours— What's-his-name."

"Henry Sumpson," said Travers, putting away the queer problem with the knowledge that its answer was locked forever within the breasts of Emperor Lee and the Black Magician—even Mohamed Ali's "face" had been saved. "Henry Sumpson. Oh—" He laughed. "Your ransom was to have been a million. Guess that'll do!"

Emperor Lee returned the laughter, with interest.

"Sure?" he questioned. "But—seriously—he's going to have his hospital. This country needs civilizing!"

Travers nodded and grinned.

"Go to it," he urged.

Emperor Lee turned a stern eye upon him.

"Me?" he asked. "Not in a million years."

SMELLS

by Berton Braley

SMELL of wind from the open sea;
Smell of tides as they ebb and flow;
Smell of kelp and the beach debris—
These are the smells that bid me go.
Smell of the grate-fire all aglow;
Smell of dinner upon the way;
Homely smells that we love to know—
These are the smells that bid me stay!

Scent of the breeze that's roaming free;
Smells of a vagrant one-ring show—
Tanbark, tents, menagerie—
These are the smells that bid me go.
Scents where the climbing roses grow;
Perfume sweet of a lilac spray;
And savory scents from the kitchen—oh,
These are the smells that bid me stay!

Odor of spices and fruits and tea;
Smells of the wharves where the ships swing slow—
Tarred rope, nitrates or hides, maybe—
These are the smells that bid me go.
Smell of my pipes in their rack a-row;
A whiff of clover and new-mown hay;
Scent of cakes on the griddle—lo!
These are the smells that bid me stay!

ENVOY

Smells that out of the distance blow—
These are the smells that bid me go.
But scent of your hair and your breath like May—
These are the smells that *make* me stay!

AMBITION A.B.

by Captain Dingle

Author of "Pig," "Joe Monkeyface," etc.

"No more I'll go to sea, to sail the Western Ocean;
A-pulling and a-hauling, I never will again.
For evermore I'll stay on shore,
I'll go to sea no more."

CHARLEY NELSON sang that oldtime song. Charley was young, and healthy; he had good lungs; he sang out loud. Shipmates of a year-long voyage grinned. They hauled wet ropes in the rain, and cared nothing for the streamlets from the furled sails; for their ship was warping into dock.

"Wot yer fink o' doin', Charley?" jeered old "Useless," the Doctor. "Goin' ter hopen a restoorong fer sailors?"

" 'Oo ever told you there wos money to be made feeding sailors?" cried the boatswain who had once commanded a barge and knew all about hungry bellies. "Charley's going to marry a widder 'oo's got a hotel, ain't you, Charley? He don't want to see no sailors, 'less it's in the bar. That's the only place where there's profit in sailormen."

Charley laughed good-humoredly. There was more than a little of truth in the boatswain's shot at a venture. Men liked Charley. He was a thorough sailor; he had always a cheery word and a helping hand for a shipmate, but he had never been a man to travel around the usual drums and dives of sailortown ashore. He always possessed a good sea chest of clothes when starting on a voyage. Often he lacked the greater part of his outfit upon returning home; for he rarely refused to help out a man in need of clothes.

"Maybe I'll have that hotel yet," he said. "Dunno about the widder part, but I sure would look a treat in a evening suit, with a gardeeneer in my button 'ole."

"Mister bloomin' Hambition, Hay Bee!" cackled the Doctor, polishing his shore-going hard hat with a wonderful rag which had survived a passage round Cape Stiff as a boiler swab.

"Come and see me, boys," grinned Charley. "And don't forget to give me the mister." Charley bent his sturdy back again, taking in the slack of a breast line, singing optimistically:

"No more I'll haul on the lee-fore-brace,
Or at royal halliards stand;
No more at a cry up aloft I'll fly
With a tarbrush in my hand.
No more I'll fork a Flemish Horse or ride a stays'l down;
I'm staying ashore for evermore, to be mayor of my old home town!"

Charley Nelson's own laugh was merriest of all as he concluded his song.

"Ambition, A. B.'s right!" growled the boatswain sourly.

But the boatswain felt a sneaking respect for the ambitious one nevertheless. Time had been when he nursed ambitions himself, though never had he cast his eyes as high as a real hotel; never had he even dreamed of wearing a high hat and chain as mayor of any town, even sailortown. But he had aimed at command once; he knew how he had felt about it; he remembered how the greatest liner afloat had seemed but a poor thing compared with the smart sailing barge he steered in the Thames estuary.

"Good luck, anyhow, boys!" Charley called out when the ship was secured and the crew dismissed. "Save your money, and put it into houses and lots. See you all at the shipping office."

" 'Ouses an' lots!" jeered Useless. "Yus, sailor fashion. Fancy 'ouses an' lots o' rum! But yer orlright, Hambition, Hay Bee. Meet yer orf th' Horn 'bout Crissmuss."

THE crew met at the shipping office to pay off, and Charley was there all spic and span, cheery and indulgent. He was the only strictly sober man there, of the forecastle crowd.

" 'Ave a drink, boys!" cried Useless when the paying off was over. "Lets orl 'ave one together any'ow, afore we gives th' gals a treat."

"Better save your money, boys," Charley smiled. "I don't want to drink my payday up. Just one'll do me. So let me shout for all hands."

"I shouted fust," yelled Useless belligerently, shouldering in through the doors of the nearest pub, which happened to be situated quite near to the shipping office.

The men trooped after him. It made no difference who shouted first. They would all have plenty of time and opportunity to shout before the day was out. Before the last man was properly lined up at the bar, more than one pair of bright eyes under a gaudy hat had peeped through the door. Before Useless had made his shout, a row of saucy little sailortown trollops sat along one wall, chattering like parokeets.

"Wot's yours, Hambition, Hay Bee?" demanded the Doctor.

"Mild whisky and lemon," said Charley.

"Bli'me! A tanner drink! 'E's a bloomin' toff, 'e is!" grumbled a man who had called for a pint of four ale.

"Let me pay for it then," smiled Charley. "I only want one."

"I'm payin'!" shouted Useless. " 'Ave wot yer like, orl of yer. That's me!"

The Doctor glanced at the girls, expecting to make a hit. But they were already regarding Charley Nelson with appraising eyes.

"Well, boys, here's luck," said Charley, nodding to the crowd. "Save your dibs, and drink from the other side of the bar."

" 'Oo wants ter be a —— crab?" demanded Useless, with another glance at the ladies.

One of them winked at him. She had got tired of trying to catch the eye of the queer Charley Nelson.

"Spend yer money like a sailorman, an' give th' gals a treat. That's me!" stated Useless, and leaned gallantly toward the lady to ask what she would have.

Ambition, A. B. laughed. He carefully calculated the cost of a round of drinks, put down the money, and straightened his coat.

"Well, old sons, sail your own traverse. I'm sailing mine. Have a round on me and good luck to you. When you come back next voyage, come and see me. Always be a welcome for an old shipmate. So long."

" 'E's a bloomin' dook, or somefink, ain't he, dearie?" the astonished young lady asked Useless as he handed her a glass of portish wine.

The door had closed behind Charley; but her voice was awed.

" 'Im? That's Hambition, Hay Bee!" retorted the Doctor. " 'E's savin' of 'is money ter buy 'im a top 'at an' button'ole, 'e is! Let 'im go to ——, sweet'eart. 'Ere's a fahsan' a year to yer."

Charley Nelson was sincere in his ideas about saving enough money to buy a snug little pub, not too far from sailortown. He had saved quite a tidy sum; but not enough. When nearing home last voyage he had given much thought to ways and means and had decided that long voyages in deepwater ships did not quite perform the miracle he expected. True, he could not spend much money in the year or more he was away; but the wages were very poor and, his outfit cost a lot out of payday; then there was little to put by, and each time he added a bit, a year had gone irrevocably.

So he had decided to try steam. Not the great mail liners to India or Australia, but something smaller in the home trade where he had heard they paid weekly wages and let sailors feed themselves. There a man might save very well; and the amount was only limited by his strength of purpose. He, tried and tested in the bitter school of hard living sou' Spainers, could live cheaply for a little while. When he had achieved his ambition, he could then begin to think about putting on a swell front.

So, instead of being fitted for a top hat, the same afternoon that he had wished his old shipmates luck found him down at Deptford where he had heard a cattle boat lay waiting for the tide, bound for Antwerp with live stock. It was a quick turn around with a vengeance, a deepwater man with a fourteen month's payday hunting a ship the same day he paid off. But that suited Charley. He wrinkled his nose a bit as he climbed over the grimy side of the *Hornet* from a wherry, for the filth and the smell were obtrusive. But clean money came from foul jobs sometimes, and that was what mattered.

"Want any hands, sir?" he inquired of a man on the dirty little bridge deck who looked as if he could not be anything else but the master, he fitted the picture so well.

The man looked him over. Charley was neatly dressed, and he looked very smart.

"Need a couple o' deck hands," the captain said doubtfully.

He looked as if he thought he ought to offer Charley command at least.

"That's me, sir!" said Charley, pulling out his discharge book. "Nelson's the name, sir, Charley Nelson. Just paid off the *Thermopylae*."

"What did you do, kill somebody?"

"No sir. I want to save money to buy a little pub o' my own."

"H'm!" grunted the skipper. "One thing's sure, my lad, you don't want to buy a farm when you've had a few weeks o' this. Come below, and sign on. This is a weekly boat. Weekly wages, and board yourself. The cook gets his pay from the hands. If you haven't got your clothes, you can get along one trip without them. We sail on the tide."

The *Hornet* lived up to her name. She was a hot proposition. In port or at sea Charley Nelson found it impossible to rid himself of the reek of rotten straw and ammonia. It saturated his bed; it would have spoiled his food, had he not been very careful to buy only provisions that would not spoil. And his soul retched at the filthiness, the untidyness, the unsailorly everything about the steamer.

Each time they made a channel crossing, with transatlantic cattle for Belgium or Belgian horses for Whitechapel jews, Charley strained his eyes for just one clean sight of a white-sailed ship. The rusted sides of the homing wanderers, with their sea grasses streaming from their weather sides and lifting forefoots, looked good; the shining paint and brass, the clean boot-topping, the glistening tar of the outward-bound clippers thrust a choke into his throat and made him curse shockingly.

"Orter go back into blue water, you ort," advised a grizzled old veteran of the coastal trade. "You be too —— pernickerty fer weekly cattle boats."

"I've got to save money," said Charley. "Else what d'ye suppose I'm sticking this stinking run for?"

"Then you orter stow yer grousin', me son. S'pose it do stink. Th' money don't. An' I ain't seen you turn yer conk up at yer wages, I ain't. You wants to eat better vittles. You don't buy enough grub to take in yer belly slack. If you did, you wouldn't feel so bloomin' sour."

"Got to save money," repeated Charley stolidly, turning from the sight of a great fourmaster under six topsails piling snowy foam to her catheads while a puffing towboat fell astern of her fast, yet still offering her a tow.

The veteran of the coast only saw a windjammer there. It meant nothing to him, except that there was steam, and the windjammer would have to take it after all.

"You talks like a parrot, you do," he said. "Gotter save money? Then you orter go into one o' them old bone boats as runs bones to the fertiliser works. Wages is better there. 'Sides, yer belly won't let you eat. Tork abart stink? Bli'me! This is vi'lets, me son!"

"What do they pay?" asked Charley.

NEXT time in Antwerp, the *Hornet* lay alongside a wharf to which were tied four lighters piled high with bones. A little steamer was hauling in, and Charley realised with a shock how unjust had been his contempt for the *Hornet*.

There was an excrescence upon the clean face of the waters indeed. The ghastly piles of old horse frames, with a myriad zooming flies making a black cloud over the obscene red fragments adhering to the broken bones, and the unnamable but easily imagined horrors unseen, sent up a reek to the filmy skies which made the *Hornet's* cattle moan in distress.

After a bitter crossing in the first real gale of coming winter, Charley Nelson went up to the little place where he kept his personal belongings and took out his bankbook. He sat long over the figures in the cheerless, heatless room. The winter was upon him, and his savings were not yet enough. Yet he feared that horrible bone business.

How his skin crawled at thought of it! To be in a ship like that, dirty, reeking, and wallowing in the mad Winter days until her cargo of bones rattled in her belly like castanets in a Dance of Death. But wages were good. No doubt of that. He had found that out beyond any argument. He went over his figures again; then pulled out another bit of paper setting forth the attractions of the snug little pub he meant to own.

"No more I'll go to sea, to sail the Western Ocean,
A-pulling and a-hauling, I never will again.
No more I'll go to sea, I've got a better notion:
For evermore I'll stay on shore, I'll go to sea no more."

He sang softly as he put away his belongings. The smiling lines at the corners of his mouth were turned the wrong way, for he knew how well those lines fitted his case, no matter how foolish they sounded. To call such a trade as he was contemplating "going to sea," was a jest too grim to grin at.

On his way to the bone wharf a blear-eyed, staggering object bumped into him, hoarsely begging a penny for beer.

"Ought to save your money, then you wouldn't be on the rocks!" grumbled Charley, handing the wreck some coppers. The recipient leared up at him, mouth open, gaping fish-like.

"Bli'me! Aint' got stingy, hev yer, Charley? 'Ere, tyke yer pennies back if it 'urts yer! Bli'me! I ain't no beggar. Wot yer fink you are, hey? 'Ere——"

Charley left the man chattering, holding on to his pennies while offering them back. For the first time Charley realised that he had given to an old shipmate grumblingly. The thought flashed across his mind that, perhaps, at some future time he might even refuse to give. He shivered. That made him realise too that he had not bought himself a warm winter coat. But he fought that temptation to the earth. He hurried past a dingy little pub, full of carousing sailors. Grimy and sordid it was, by daylight, but the door, swinging open as he passed, let out upon him a warmth, odorous, and rich with salty voices, which reminded him of another such snug little place which was to be his some day.

The feeling lasted him until he reached the wharf and boarded the old bones steamer. *Cormorant* she was named, but Charley missed the humor of that. He blinded his eyes and muffled his nose and refused to let himself think until he had signed on as a foremast hand and dumped a fresh "donkey's breakfast" into a spare bunk. He had taken a good bed aboard the *Hornet*. His experience there warned him to waste nothing more valuable than straw on this new ship.

He sat alone on the littered forecastle head late that night, smoking the stoutest twist tobacco to drive the fearsome reek from his nostrils. The steamer was sailing at midnight, and every other man of the *Cormorant's* brood had gone ashore shopping. They might be used to their noisome trade; but they didn't brag about it, and they hankered not at all for unnecessary hours of it.

Charley listened shudderingly to the buzzing hum of flies in the open hatch. The holds were empty, but rich with memories; and the fly loves old memories. The older the better. Far out beyond the quiet of the docks, sounded the distant clang of street cars and the drone of city life. Through the darkness riverward he could just discern the towering trucks of a sailing ship waiting for the lock gates to open for her entrance. Even the vague tracery of her spars almost sickened him with remorse. But he pulled furiously on his pipe, and shut his eyes, only to open them quickly and forget the tall clipper, at the sound of argumentative voices bawling loudly and approaching the steamer.

"We'll see, my lad!" growled a strong voice, easily recognised by Charley as belonging to his new captain. "You'll work it out if I have to lock the darbies on you!"

"'Ave a 'eart, Cap'n, 'ave a 'eart!" whined another voice, which brought Charley to his feet. "I got a weak stommick, give yer my word I 'ave. I carn't stand no sech ship as yourn. I'll die on yer 'ands, an' vey'll 'ang yer, Cap'n. I'll pay yer back, give yer my word I will!"

"Get aboard!" growled the captain boosting a struggling figure over the rail.

"That fur coat o' mine you pawned and lost the ticket of was worth fifty quid. That'll take you six months to work off. Hey, you new man, Nelson! Keep yer eye on this dirty rascal and look out if you let him go!"

He kicked the dirty rascal forward, and Charley Nelson went to take charge of him, grinning with real merriment for the first time in many a long day.

"Come along o' me, Useless," he said. Useless peered through the murky darkness, almost forgetting to breathe with care.

"Bli'me if 't ain't old Hambition, Hay Bee!" he gasped.

"Old hoss, old hoss, what brought you here?" sang Charley as he hauled Useless along to his quarters.

"Stow yer josh!" growled Useless irritably.

He had tried to ease off Charley's hand, but found that an old shipmate could hold on as tightly as a stranger.

"You an' yer 'ouses an' lots!" A wave of fragrance swept over them as they passed the hatchway. "Bli'me! Ain't she ripe!" he choked. "'Ere, Hambition, Hay Be, let me loose, will yer? I ain't done nothink to be killed in a p'isn tank like this for."

"What have you been up to?"

"Nothink, s'welp me! I wuz broke, an' went to ve 'ome. Vis blooming old bones skipper lived there, in a swell room. I 'ad a bunk in ve doss. I arsked 'im, civil, for a few coppers for grub, an' wot do he do? Orfers me a job cookin' in 'is ol' lavender box! You knows I got a weak stommick, Charley, don't yer. So I borrers a overcoat wot 'e wuzn't usin' an' hocks it. Ven I lorst ve bloomin' ticket, Charley, take me oath I did. He wuz goin' to call——"

"What did you do with the money? If you gave it back to him——"

"Vere yer goes again!" whined Useless. "'Ow d'yer fink a bloke can keep 'old o' money wevver like vis?"

"Houses and lots?" grinned Charley.

"Lots," Useless amended tersely. "Now 'e says I got to work it out cookin' aboard o' vis——"

"That won't take long, old hoss," Charley comforted him. "Men eat hearty in this trade. More they eat the more you earn. Here's your berth."

There was plenty of opportunity for Useless to test the true strength of his stomach. Charley Nelson himself wondered how long such a trade could endure. Sheer lack of men must kill it at last, he thought. For the *Cormorant* was small, old, and low-powered. She carried her evil cargo across the narrow seas in screaming winter storms that threatened to lay her bones as bare as those she rattled within her.

The one thing which enabled Charley to endure was the mounting up of his savings. He examined them every trip now. He could save money faster than ever. But he showed in his face that he was saving money, and it was not exactly happiness that revealed the secret. Useless knew what it was, and Useless took it as a personal grievance.

"'E ain't buyin' no grub, 'e ain't," he complained to any of the hands who would listen. "Bits o' horsemeat sossidge an' stale rootee. Middle o' winter, too! 'Ow do 'e expect a bloomin' cook to earn a honest livin' if 'e don't want nothink cooked?"

Nobody knew. Nobody cared. If Ambition, A. B. chose to eat plain hardtack, or even gnaw the box, it was his own affair as long as he did his work. Charley Nelson did that. He did his work like a sailorman. The Doctor told the captain.

"'Ow can I work out wot I owes you, if you don't make ve crew pay me?" he mourned.

"Who don't pay?" demanded the skipper.

"Hambition, Hay Bee don't. 'E don't have no grub to be cooked."

"What the —— should he pay for then? Take it out o' the rest. He's worth the lot of 'em."

But there were times when Charley Nelson gagged at his self-imposed durance vile. The *Cormorant* docked in the same basin as a score of lordly ships. Every time she dragged her old bones to rest Charley saw some well-known and beloved deepwaterman arriving or departing; saw the bronzed men; heard the rousing chanteys; smelled the intriguing aromas of distant ports and trackless seas.

Those were the times when he had to call upon every fiber of his resolution. He passed cosy little pubs, with red curtains in the windows, which were full of noisy joviality, doing a roaring trade with a newly paid-off deepwater crew. He passed them; but sometimes he was shivering when he got out of sight. Old shipmates boisterously invited him to join them. He refused, though he knew he need not spend one shilling. And there were times when he craved companionship so keenly that he was almost ready to squander his savings to secure it. Almost—that was his sheet anchor. Charley was made of true metal. He had set himself a goal, and he would make that goal in spite of —— and high water.

"You orter go to work in the fertiliser works, mate," one of his shipmates told him one day when the *Cormorant* was ordered into dry dock for repairs. "Unloadin' bones. You gets beer, an' overtime, an' you smokes yer pipe, an'——"

"What do they pay?" asked Charley.

HE WENT to work unloading bones. He had thought the zenith of unpleasantness had been passed in the *Cormorant*. He found how utterly mistaken he had been. He sweat and gritted his teeth, and counted up his savings every night. He was not sure that the game was worth the sweat, but the figures mounted steadily. He saw the skipper of the little steamer, who told him the dry-docking would take a month. Charley decided to stick it out, and go back to the ship when she was ready.

One day a seaworn, decrepit bark warped in, cranky and fetid with a cargo of bones from far Monte Video. He went to work unloading her; and before he rove off the first whip he knew her for the ghost of one of the queens of the old tea clippers of the sea's most glorious day.

That night Charley went out into the drizzling mist of the streets after his nightly examination of his hoard. He could not shake off a feeling of nausea. That grand old clipper, reduced to such a trade, affected him as the sight of a beloved queen reduced to pedling matches in the bright-light part of the city would affect a loyal subject.

He felt as if his throat would never swallow freely again. Never in all his life had he really needed a drink of beer as he needed it now. He could not summon fortitude enough to forego the easing of his need. He stole around side streets, coughing in the fog, seeking a small, unfrequented place where he might drink a single glass alone.

Finding a place, he passed and repassed it twice, fighting against heart and head and stomach. At last he thrust in through the door. He bought a pint of ale. It was the cheapest drink. It warmed him. He had not been eating as much or as well as he ought to have done; so the ale took hold of him generously.

He counted out the price of another pint, and sternly buttoned up the rest of his money in a body belt. The landlord regarded him queerly as he pushed over the second pint. Not often did he see a man, so obviously a sailorman, so careful of his cash. But Charley gave him no heed, drinking his ale greedily.

" 'S bloomin' shame, that's what I say," he remarked, nodding over his pot and addressing nobody.

"You're right, mate," agreed the bonyface, drawing near, hopeful of hearing something worth while. "Wot they been doin' to you?"

Charley looked at him as if he were some grotesque specimen of marine life. He swallowed the rest of his ale quickly, and turned to leave; the door opened with a bang, and in burst a whole crew of half tipsy sailors out for a good time, and swept Charley back to the bar in their rush.

"Whoy, dang moy oyes ef 't ain't Charley Nelson!" roared a red-faced Yorkshireman, whanging Charley on the shoulder with a fist like a smoked ham. "Moy oldest chum, mates! Sup, lad! Danged ef I ain't glad——"

Charley Nelson was the life and soul of the party by ten o'clock. He sang. He bought. He laughed loudly and told yarns. He told of his little pub, telling them all to come and see him. They wanted to know where he worked, to save money like that, but he dodged that question.

"I'll sing you a song, boys," he laughed. "Give the chorus a good rouser." He sang an old fore-bitter that every sailor knew:

"I been a wild rover, for many a year,
And I spent all my money, on wimmen and beer.
But now I am hard up, and all on the rocks,
And I got no tobacco, in my old bacca box; singin':"

"Chorus, boys!"

"Nay, no never! Never no more!
Will I play the wild rover,
No never, no more!"

Nobody seemed to notice the aptness of the song; least of all the singer. It was a rousing, roaring evening. Charley went to bed feeling exalted far above old bones.

In the grey morning he repented very bitterly; for he had a terrific head, his body belt was empty of cash, and for perhaps the first time since setting out in pursuit of his ambition he felt a sneaking contempt for himself.

That train of thought bringing him to ease of mind, he took up his savings book again and totalled up the cost of his first transgression. The result made him groan. But when he started out to go to work, he wore a grim and determined expression which fitted him no better than did his work. He went to the fertiliser works and asked to be paid off. The foreman wanted him to stay. Few men worked like Charley Nelson.

"I'm going to sea," said Charley.

He went to the drydock, and begged the captain of the *Cormorant* to put him to work. The ship was almost ready.

"I want to save my money," he explained.

"That's the talk," the skipper said approvingly.

He had met few men in the fertiliser trade who talked that way.

"Stay along with me, Nelson, and I'll help you get your mate's ticket. There's worse trades than this."

On her first trip after drydocking, returning from Antwerp full laden with her grisly cargo, the *Cormorant* was overtaken by a gale which made her stagger and groan and rattle her bones. Out of the North Sea it came, with sleet and hail driving aslant the grey seas like spears. There was no horizon. No sky. Yeasty combers, vicious and snarling off the shoals, burst aboard the old steamer like live things of hate. Hail rattled on the iron decks like shrapnel; it cut men's faces; it smashed skylight glasses.

Charley Nelson, kept at the wheel for a whole watch because the skipper trusted no other man, was trembling and blue from the bitter cold when he staggered from the bridge at last. The smell of onions and hash swirled about him as he passed the galley. The door was closed, but the port was open a crack. He needed something hot. All he had, of his own stores, was coffee, and food which could be eaten cold. But coffee at least was his. He called through the port; Useless cautiously opened the upper half of the iron door.

"Wot yer want?" he whined. "You ain't got no 'ash comin'."

"Give me a mug of coffee, Doctor," shivered Charley.

"Go to ——!" screamed Useless.

He was frightened at the way the little steamer wallowed. A sea roared aboard as he clung there. It crashed down upon the fore well deck and the steamer came to a halt as if she had struck a cliff. She shivered, rolled heavily and staggered on. Useless slammed the door while the water surged outside. But he opened again and thrust his grimy face in the crack. It was almost white under the film of grease.

"Yer arsk me for cawfee? —— bli'me! Wot am I 'ere for? Tell me that! Only fer starvation blokes like you, Mister Hambition, Hay Bee, wot don't want no grub cooked, I'd be safe at 'ome, or else in a real ship dry an' 'andsome. Cawfee! You ain't got none left, an' you knows it! Yer too bloody stingy ter buy any, an' yer comes——"

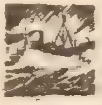
Charley started away. He could not believe that he had forgotten to buy the only item of his stores which he permitted himself as a luxury. A dirty hand clawed as his oilskin sleeve.

" 'Ere! Wot yer runnin' away for? —— lumme, you comes to me fer cawfee, an' you makes me open ve bloomin' door, gettin' me all wet, and you runs away when a bloke's givin' yer somefink. Arf crazy, you are, Hambition, Hay Bee.! I allus said so! 'Ere!"

A mug of steaming coffee, and a small plate of savory hash was poked through the door crack, and the door clanged shut viciously. Charley stood amazed. Then another sea crashed aboard, and he hopped on to the fiddley to escape it. To make it safe, he ate his hash and drank his coffee in that security; then went to return the dishes.

"You're all right, Doctor," he said, earnestly. "I'll make this up to you."

"Ho, I expecks you will!" snarled Useless through the port. "Arsk me up to yer bloomin' pub to 'ave a arf pint o' fours! Go to ——!"



THAT night Charley shivered on the forecastle head, keeping lookout, flogging his arms for warmth. Those were crowded seas and narrow ones. All about the laboring *Cormorant* roared the sirens of great steamers; the hoarse barks of small sailing vessels' hand-pump horns; the clatter of an anchored ship's bell.

Now and then, when the steamer slowed down to let her anxious skipper listen for directive sounds, the mournful tolling of a bell buoy, or still more dirge-like groan of a whistle buoy, came creeping down the gale. And lights were seen only when they were so near as to be all but useless.

"Don't you hear anything, lookout?" bawled the mate, clawing his way forward and mounting beside Charley.

"I hear too much," grumbled Charley. He was alert for every little sound; but the steamer pitched so that her progress was a thunderous sound itself; she dipped every few seas so deeply that the lookout only saved his life by swarming up the fore stay like a monkey.

"We're somewhere near the lightship," said the mate, anxiously.

A moment of uncertainty passed, while two bitter seas swept over the steamer's foredeck and the hail slashed pitilessly Then a sound separated itself from the howl of the gale, the hiss of the seas.

"Hear that? What is it?" barked the mate nervously.

"Breaking seas and a horn. One blast," shouted Charley.

"It's two blasts!" the mate shouted.

"I heard one," Charley maintained. Then he gripped the mate's arm. "It's here! Starb'd the hellum, sir! Starb'd the hellum!" he bellowed toward the bridge.

The mate was already clawing his way aft; Charley tumbled down the iron ladder to the streaming well-deck, and hammered on the forecastle door.

"Turn out, lads!" he shouted. "We're cut down! Aft, for your lives!"

He started aft again, and then the steamer rolled over and over under the terrific impact of a laden full rigged ship driving before the gale, which struck her full on the bow and swept her decks murderously with her long jib boom and dolphin striker.

There were few sounds except the harsh grinding of the tortured hulls. The great clipper, halted in full career, swung to the incubus with a terrific crashing of gear and thundering of canvas. Charley Nelson rolled along to the bridgedeck ladder, which he gripped desperately while the steamer's side was ripped open, her bridge rail torn away, and her hatches burst from her by the wrench of the collision and the boarding, ravenous seas.

Men staggered out of the *Cormorant's* sleeping quarters, hurled into the icy seas the moment they emerged into the air.

"Boats! Swing out the boats!" yelled the skipper. But no boats could be swung out. The little steamer was already on her side and half submerged.

"Look out for lines!" roared a calliope voice through a megaphone hidden in the murk. Somebody laughed at that. But there was the sound of thrashing canvas, of tackle running as a ship came to the wind, of seas slapping sharply at a hull no longer moving. And a heaving line did whiz from somewhere and fall across the steamer's giddy deck; though nobody caught it, not expecting it. A groping hand caught Charley Nelson's leg just as the blood-knot in the end of the line fell into the sea again, or he could have got to it.

" 'Oo is it? Is it you, Charley?" gasped the frightened voice of old Useless. "—— 'elp us, we're slippin' our bloomin' cable this time. 'Oo wuz on lookout? Bli'me, I'd like ter meet 'im afore I let's gow!"

"Save yer breath and hold fast to me," gritted Charley, setting his teeth and hauling at the dead weight of the Doctor.

"Look out for lines! You on the steamer! You're sinking!"

The trememdous voice roared again; again somebody laughed. But again a line snaked out of the driving sleet. Another, and another.

"Hang on to the ladder!" shouted Charley. He pushed Useless away and made a frantic grasp for a line which fell almost across his feet. He caught it, and choked dryly with relief as he made a bowline in the end and slipped it around the Doctor's shaking shoulders.

"Haul away!" he bawled, as a vague, gigantic shape formed in the gloom; and pushing Useless into the freezing seas, he gripped the bight of the bowline himself and together they were dragged to safety.

Then while Useless was thawing out in the sailing ship's galley, Charley helped to pull his shipmates out of the maw of grisly death. How grisly he could not realise before. He had been dragged from the bridge-deck ladder. The men he was helping to haul in had been swept from the fore well deck. He pulled in icy lines to which rows of stark dead ribs clung before he reached the man. Great, fat, sluggish rats clung to the lines in defiance of men, in scorn of dead bones. All the bitter chill, the slashing sleet, the hideous uproar could not account for one fraction of the sense of cold horror that numbed him.

But an end came, even to that. Two firemen, trapped below, went down with the *Cormorant*. The sailing ship, the destroyer, though not in fault, lay to under shortened sail waiting for daylight and a tug, for her headgear had suffered and she could not sail. She was near her port anyhow. As for damage to herself, she had cut down the decrepit old *Cormorant* with her sharp stem and was scarcely leaking enough to wet the pump leathers.

"W'ere's Charley Nelson?" chattered Useless, frantically running around the spacious decks from group to group of rescued and rescuers. "W'ere's Hambition, Hay Bee.? Bli'me! Vis is a 'ot lot, vis is! Hey, Charley!"

He suddenly found Charley, standing in a pool of water, shivering so that his teeth chattered, talking to the chief mate of the ship.

"Hey, Charley, wot yer fink this 'ooker is?"

"I know," chattered Charley with a grin. "Mister Douglas just told me I can sail bosun next voyage."

"Bosun? O' ve flyin' *Fermopylæ?*" gasped Useless.

"Better get into the galley and dry yourself, Nelson," said the officer. "You, too, cook. You're both blue from your ducking."

THE *Thermopylæ* docked. She had to go under repair. Useless accompanied Charley out of the docks, glancing at him from time to time as if unable to fathom him. Presently the urge grew too strong.

"Hey, ain't yer goin' bosun o' that clipper?" he demanded.

"No more I'll go to sea, to sail the Western Ocean,
A-pulling and a-hauling I never will again!"

chanted Charley with a wise smile.

Useless glared at him.

"You an' yer top 'at an' yer button'ole!" he raved. "Fat lot o' good yer Hambition done yer. Arf drowned in a stinkin' ole boneyard tramp. Now yer got a charnce to gow bosun o' ve finest ship as ever murdered a ship's cook! You orter——"

"What are you going to do, Useless?" smiled Charley.

"Me?" snapped the Doctor, acidly. "I'm gowin' ter get a job cookin' kippers an' 'am an' eggs in a little eatin' 'ouse I knows."

"You'll be at sea in two days, without clothes, and you'll come home, and you'll be at sea again two days after that," said Charley with a wise look. Useless snorted.

"Fat lot you knows! I been offered a berth in ve *Fermopylæ,* if yer wants ter know. Ships? Yus, in pitchers! No more gettin' drowned fer me!"

"Good luck, then, old sock. When I start in my little business come and see me. I'll give you a job if your broke."

Charley mourned the necessity of buying a new outfit to replace the clothes lost in the *Cormorant*. He pored long and morosely over his savings account, wondering whether after all the aim was worth the shot. That experience in the old bones steamer was a gruesome, shuddery thing. But he put every evil memory aside; bought his outfit in a slop shop and went down to the fertiliser works.

"Got a job, sir?" he asked.

"Start right in, Charley!" the foreman said.

Charley worked overtime, Sundays and holidays. Men cursed him because he set such a pace that they had to sweat to keep alongside him. He sweat himself, and worked harder. Day after day he saw the golden trucks of the *Thermopylæ* high up over the dock buildings as she lay in the drydock. He saw her every day for three months. The only time he was ever seen to let up in his work was when he straightened his back to gaze far-visioned over those glowing spars.

But he resolutely kept to his job. His evenings were spent miser fashion, gloating over his hoard. Once or twice he met Useless. Useless got a job ashore, but not cooking. He ran errands for dock wallopers, fetching them cans of ale, pennorth's of bread and cheese, papers of shag tobacco.

"Can't stay away from the ships, hey?" Charley bantered him one drizzling day when men were not working and Useless had drifted down by the fertiliser works seeking company.

"Got a 'oliday," growled Useless, avoiding Charley's eye. "I ain't shovelin' no rotten bones, any'ow!"

He turned away; but swung back to shoot at Charley:

" 'Ow about yer top 'at now, Mister Hambition Hay Bee? I ain't seen no nosegays in yer button'ole yet."

"Week after next," said Charley. "In sight now, Useless. In sight at last," Ambition, A. B. sighed heavily.

Useless wandered from the docks in a heavy mood. He had never believed that Charley Nelson would stick to his purpose. But he had to believe that Charley was near his goal when the plain word was passed, for Ambition, A. B. was no liar, no blowhard. Useless spent the rest of that drizzling day seeking a regular job. If Charley could do it, so could he. He might not be able to buy a business, but if he got in the way of shore work perhaps Charley might give him that job he had jestingly promised him.

On the day that Charley Nelson left the fertiliser works for the last time, with head held high and his money in his pockets, he felt like a conqueror. The golden trucks of the *Thermopylæ* had been gone from the visible skyline for some days. She was no doubt in her loading berth. But there were other tall spars in view, and Charley could regard them indulgently. Men might go to sea in those fine clippers all their lives, and still be nothing more than sailors, slaves to the sea, beasts of bitter burden. He had been a beast of burden. He shuddered to think how bitter that burden had been. But now at last he was something more than a sailor. He swelled out his chest. He felt good.

"No more I'll haul on the lee-fore-brace,
Or at royal halliards stand;
No more at the cry up aloft I'll fly
With a tarpot in my hand——"

He sang aloud. He felt good. No mistake about that. He jingled gold in his pockets. But he did not feel quite so good as he imagined he would feel. Perhaps the nausea of the fertiliser works was still with him. That would soon get out of his system once he got clear of the docks.

Old shipmates shouted to him, and he answered them cheerily. He felt a little of the landlord already working within him. Very soon now he would come down to the docks when ships came in and hand his neat business cards to the sailors. He would keep nothing but the best. The best was not too good for sailormen.

As he was about to turn off the main road he caught sight of a flag fluttering at a tall masthead over a distant corner of the dock wall. It was red. He tried to make it out. A broad flight of steps led up from where he stood to a glass doorway in a grey building, and he stepped up until he could see the entire flag. It was a red and blue flag, with a white star set upon the dividing line between the colors.

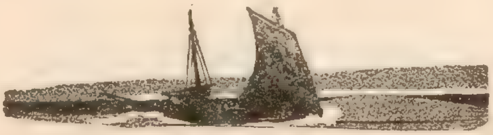
He stepped up more steps, to satisfy himself which of the famous Aberdeen flyers that was. There were two or three in dock. One had just come in. He stood at the top of the steps before he was sure; then the door opened, and he almost fell inside. A smart ship's officer caught him with a good humored growl. Through the open door buzzed voices; salty, rough, familiar voices. The drone of a shipping master reading a ship's articles to a new crew sounded like a sleepy bee. There was a smell, too, of new slop clothes, and strong tobacco. The officer turned Charley around and laughed.

"Ho, here you are, then! Thought better of it, hey, Nelson? Come on inside. Thought you wouldn't turn up. The bosun's job's filled, though. You fellows never know your own minds two minutes."

Without a thought of protesting, Charley Nelson permitted himself to be led inside to where the *Thermopylæ* was signing on for a year-long voyage. And some of the men knew him.

" 'Ullo! 'Ere's Hambition, Hay Bee!" cackled Useless from the crowd. "Where's yer top 'at, Charley?"

"Hanging on the line. I'm going to get it," grinned Charley. The grin was a bit sheepish, but not as sheepish as might have been expected.



HAWG TRACKS

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by G. W. Barrington

Author of "Danny Simmon's First Case," "Mostly by 'Phone," etc.

CHAPTER I

THE ROBBERY

ONE evening in November, not many years ago, Dan Hamilton, proprietor of a pharmacy on the outskirts of the little city of Seminole in East Texas, glanced at the clock above the back bar of the soda fountain, noted that it was past nine and, as trade had dwindled to zero, prepared to close for the night.

Hamilton served as his own prescription clerk, cashier and manager. His clerk had been released from duty, the proprietor having remained to fill the wants of late customers—nine o'clock is late, in a city of that size—he being the only person about the establishment authorized to fill a prescription.

Having snapped off all the lights but the one above the front desk and another behind the glass partition which marked off the sacred boundaries of the prescription room, Hamilton emptied the cash drawer, tucked the money into a canvas bag, carried it back to the safe, placed it in that stanch receptacle, gave the combination a twirl, turned off the remaining lights and stepped into the street.

Locking the door and shaking it tentatively to see that the tumblers had caught, the druggist was about to start on his lonesome journey homeward when he heard the sound of boots pounding on the sidewalk on the opposite side of the empty street and a moment later two men came running across the intersection.

"Hey! Wait a minute!" came the call.

Already Hamilton had stepped back to the door and was fitting the key into the lock.

It was no new thing to him, these hurried footsteps in the night, anxious voices asking for camphor or castor oil or toothache lotion. All a part of the day's work, and, as the druggist swung the door open and stepped inside, he was congratulating himself inwardly that he had been found so near the store. Otherwise, he might have been summoned from a warm bed to revisit the store and supply the wants of his customers.

The moon was full overhead, and objects within the building could be discerned easily. Hamilton located the desk and stepped toward it to turn on the swinging light. As he did so, he became aware that one of his prospective patrons was tramping right at his heels, evidently in a great rush to be waited on.

"Just a moment please," said Hamilton. "I'll turn on the light and then ——"

Hamilton ceased speaking abruptly and stopped in his tracks as the men behind grabbed his collar and poked the cold barrel of a pistol against the back of his neck.

"Never mind the light," came a low voice in his ear. "Now get your hands up and keep 'em up. Now walk!"

Turning his captive to the left, the man behind steered him across the front of the store, around the end of the cigar case, and back along the shelving.

Hamilton had left the key in the lock, and as they passed the front door, he saw another man lock it, then take station at the curb.

Reaching the prescription room, Hamilton's captor drew down the shade of the window which opened on a side street, produced a pocket torch and searched out the safe.

Propelling the druggist to it, he threw a glaring little circle of light on the dial.

"Open it!"

Hamilton hesitated.

"I mean right now!"

The druggist was no coward. He was perfectly cool, and as unworried about his personal safety as any one could have been under such circumstances. Given the slightest opportunity, he would have battled for his own, even against odds, but that opportunity was lacking.

That firm hand still gripped his collar, even while steadying the torch across Hamilton's shoulder. The gun bored relentlessly against the tip of his spine, and the voice of the robber was the more menacing because it was cool, even and businesslike. At the same time, the man spoke with a queer mechanical effect, evidently to disguise his accent.

There was nothing else for it. Hamilton gripped the polished knob and commenced to twirl the dial around with steady fingers.

To the left past zero, then three times to the right, and stop on ninety; twice around to the left, stopping on forty-five, then ——

A low whistle sounded outside, and the flashlight snapped off.

"Wait, buddy," came that steady voice, "and if you want to eat breakfast in the morning, don't you wiggle or breathe out loud!

"Hold 'er just as you are, till I tell you to get busy."

Straightening from his task, Hamilton saw a faint light flicker on the pavement out in front, and caught the distant coughing of a car, rapidly growing louder.

Looking through the glass partition and the street window, Hamilton saw the lookout man stroll casually down the street, and, a few moments later, stroll as casually back again, reaching the front of the store just as the car, a dilapidated flivver, went coughing and rattling past.

Hamilton's muscles tensed, and a curse rolled from the tip of his tongue. For a fleeting second he contemplated resistance.

Seminole was small enough so that every one knew all about the comings and goings of his neighbors. Hamilton recognized that battered old runabout, and, though he could not see them under the hood, he knew that in it were Luke Haskell and Danny Simmons, deputy sheriffs, bound for a dance at "Pappy" Beasley's cabin on Hickory Ridge, over in the flatwood country.

Maddeningly provoking!

Here was brigandage, with an honest citizen in its toils; there were two officers, as willing and efficient as any that ever drew a pay-check.

To make the situation more disgusting, if possible, the man out in front had the effrontery to scratch a match on an awning post and light a cigaret, while in view of the occupants of the car, as it rattled and barked past.

In the light of that flaring match, Hamilton caught a fleeting vision of an impudent, heavy-jowled face, with beetling brows and pugnacious, protruding jaw. Then the grip on his collar tightened and the pressure of the gunbarrel increased.

"Stop that trying to get your eyes full," grated his guard, menacingly. "Hop to business and open 'er up. Spin that pretty little dial a little more, and let's see how many eggs are in the nest!"

Bending again to his task, Hamilton silently completed the combination, turned the handle and swung the safe door open.

"There it is. Help yourself, or do you want me to get it out for you?"

"No, thanks. That'll be all, right now. Stand over here with your face to the wall, and don't look back like Lot's wife did. She had hard luck, you know."

The robber raised his torch so that it showed through the panes of the partition and snapped it on and off three times.

In answer to the signal the watcher on the walk unlocked the door, relocked it behind him and tramped heavily along the counter.

"Slip us a little light, pal," he called in a rough, careless voice. "It's so infernal dark in here I can't tell which way from t'other. Lead me to the dough, an' I'll ——"

"Shut up, you swaggering idiot!" growled the other, impatiently. "This is one business that it doesn't pay to advertise. You're entirely too reckless to suit me.

"First you have to light a match out there just for smartness, and now you shoot off that bazoo of yours when there is company present, when you know there isn't another voice like it between the two oceans.

"Cut out the comedy and sack that stuff. We're due to get out of here."

Working swiftly, the second robber stripped the safe of its contents, throwing books and papers to the floor, after having assured himself that they contained no money. Finally he stuffed several hundred dollars in currency into the money sack, jingled a handful of silver into his pocket and turned toward the street.

"All right, pal. I've got 'er. Le's go."

Driving Hamilton ahead of him, the leader followed his mate to the front. The man who carried the loot unlocked the door and passed out. The other relocked it, and dropped the key into Hamilton's pocket, then issued final instructions.

"Start to walking in any direction you choose, but don't yell or look back, or there will be one long stream of carriages calling at your house and you won't know anything about it.

"Now hit the trail, Mister Man. We're glad to have met you, but we don't need you any longer."

Being a man of sufficient discretion to balance his natural impulses, Hamilton hit the trail. Hamilton didn't look back. Hamilton kept going right in the direction in which he had started.

A movie hero wouldn't have done that; a sensible man would.

CHAPTER II

ON HICKORY RIDGE

LATE in October, Pappy Beasley had dug the sweet potatoes from his flatiron-shaped patch down by Devil's bayou, and at once the luscious tubers had become a part of the family's daily dinner menu.

After each meal, Edna, Beasley's motherless daughter, gathered the brown-baked peelings from about the oil-clothed table and dumped them into an oaken keg which Pappy had installed on the tamped-clay hearth in front of the homely fireplace.

When the first November frost came, Pappy and the girl made an expedition to the lower Neches bottom, where they gathered ripe persimmons, sugary, frost-cured, tart.

Pappy handpicked a quantity of this delectable fruit, bruised it in a dishpan with a potato masher, and dumped it into the keg atop the potato parings, tamping the whole mass down tightly.

Pappy then carried water from the spring and poured it over the dry ingredients in judicious quantities, then went stumping off on his pegleg to attend to the smaller affairs of life, while that supreme alchemist, kindly old Dame Nature, took up the task of completing that master libation—persimmon beer.

Throughout the early weeks of winter Pappy would add the daily modicum of peelings, fruit and water, preventing such a dread calamity as the possible overflow of the keg by giving thanks each day for his daily flagons, quaffed in soul-satisfying quantities from a gourd dipper. Also he would greet the wayfaring pilgrim and speed the departing guest, gourd in hand, appetites the only guide.

Art enters everywhere, even in so simple an operation as the concoction of persimmon beer, and no man in the Neches flat, no man in Seminole County, which is equivalent to saying no man anywhere, could compete with Pappy in preparing that stock beverage, consumed universally from the south bank of the Neches to the north bank of the Angelina, full eight miles away, and the fame of which had spread to the more enlightened portions of that dim, half-real unmeasured district lying out there which the denizens of the flatwood had heard of, but never had seen—the outside world.

Straying in from that vast, unknown province, had come grotesque reports that a far-off Congress had met somewhere, to enact some sort of ill-considered and entirely inoperative statute which sought to outlaw persimmon beer, along with corn liquor and ribbon cane rum, but this monstrous imposition had aroused little resentment on the flat.

Volstead and his inhuman cohorts might legislate, the enforcement organization might might function feebly, the state rangers snoop around, but persimmon beer was persimmon beer, above the law in one way, beneath it in another.

It was too big an institution to be cast aside for fear of inconsequential fine or imprisonment; it was too small for chair-warming bureaucrats to notice, particularly as they knew themselves to be as powerless to eradicate it as to eradicate love or hunger or sleep or any other human desire or necessity.

Persimmon beer comprised the flatwood idea of normalcy. Those who consumed it felt no sense of guilt. If they blushed, it was not for their own culpability, but for a country which made futile effort to enjoin a freedman from eating and drinking and thinking and doing whatever he dern pleased so long as he imposed no harm upon his fellows.

So thought the flatwood, and the flatwood was complacently satisfied with its own philosophy, having had no opportunity to compare its culture with that of outlying communities, the unfortunate citizens of which were more to be pitied than censured, living as they did, far from the real center of enlightenment, which was indefinitely located somewhere between the two rivers, and, transversely, between the eastern tip of Hickory Ridge and the big gum tree which marked the western boundary of the Bailey settlement.

Within those long-established frontiers was persimmon beer a fixture, a tradition, and emblem of the people who imbibed it, simple, wholesome, bubbling with the joy of life.

As to the intoxicating qualities of the drink, that depended upon the water content. Much water, a light drink.

With that fact in view, it may be pertinent to remark that Pappy was a cripple, and it was a long way from his spring to the house—and up-hill, at that.

ONE evening in mid-November, Edna's eighteenth birthday arrived, and there was high carnival at the stanch, low-eaved, mud-chimneyed log cabin on Hickory Ridge.

Hair pasted tightly to his forehead with real toilet soap, bristling beard partially tamed by much drenching and brushing, immaculately corduroyed and befittingly flanneled, Pappy perched delightedly on the dining-table, hauled to one corner of the room, scraping his ancient fiddle stridently, his peg poking straight out toward the dancers, sustained by the sound knee, which bobbed with metronomic regularity, as he beat out the time with his mateless heel, his jowl caressing the old fiddle lovingly, his entire being swaying in the ecstatic fever of the provincial folk-tunes.

At Pappy's right, the slimmest Underhill boy sawed a lusty second fiddle, slightly nervous, a little erratic, but doggedly persistent. Close to Pappy's other elbow, Lem Whitaker forced raucous wails and unexpected squawks and rumbling blares of sound from the gnarled inwards of a despondent cornet, handed down from a grandsire whose sturdy lungs had blown every true tone out of it, long before he had learned to master its keys.

Out on the lye-bleached puncheons of the cabin floor, girls in neat calicoes and aristocratic ginghams, boys calf-booted, conventionally jeansed, conscientiously soap-pomaded, welted the floor in a steady pounding rhythm, while the elders, knotted about in the corners; gossiped contentedly or silently reflected on days long gone when their own limbs and hearts were young and that same fiddle and cornet had set them capering.

Fat pine and green hickory glowing behind the andirons; warm light flickering cozily on the rough-hewn ceiling beams; aroma of barbecued shoat floating in from the whitewashed kitchen; the keg with three dippers strung to the wall beside it; Deputy-Sheriff Danny Simmons, a native son, a guest of honor, quiet-spoken, slow-smiling, slender and handsome in his dark, wild way; jovial Deputy-Sheriff Luke Haskell bellowing promptings to the flatwood folk as they drummed out their message of good cheer; the carnival spirit rampant—all the cares and worries of a provincial people, short crops, lost yearlings, shunted into the background, as the smiling, chattering, pineyfolk swayed and strutted and glided through the measures of the time-honored quadrilles, waltzes and polkas, undiscarded and unchanged since the day when the first white settlers had driven the protesting Cherokees from the district.

Then the oak-planked, wrought-hinged door swung open, and the outside world came in.

ELEVEN o'clock had whirled gaily past, and the elders had drifted homeward, surfeited with rustic cheer, old eyes and brittle bones craving rest.

Out on the floor, two sets of four couples, reliable all-nighters, settled to the gay grind.

A half-dozen lads and lasses sat about the room, waiting for their turns.

When the two strangers came in, every eye in the room focused on them. The musicians still scraped and puffed mechanically; Luke Haskell bawled his scarce-needed promptings; the feet of the dancers missed no beat; but the coming of any outlander was an event in itself, and, in addition, these two strangers would have attracted their full share of attention, almost anywhere.

The first to enter was a slender gray man, delicate featured, neatly attired, city mannered. Behind him came his physical, mental and temperamental opposite—a gross, swaggering giant of a fellow, onrushing and irresponsible, if appearances were any indication.

Closing the door quietly, the elder man leaned easily against the casing, composedly waiting for recognition.

The other slapped his hat carelessly on the table and favored the room and its inmates with a patronizing survey, his bold eyes finally resting on the keg and gourds.

Instantly his heavy, ruddy face lighted, and he guffawed above the din of the dance:

"Some luck, pardner! We've stumbled right into a choc party!"

The slender gray man drew down his delicately arched brows in a frown of irritation and spoke to his companion in a tone too low for the others to hear.

The big man laughed again, then swaggered across to the hearth, filled a gourd, lifted it as one who gives a toast, then drank it without taking the vessel from his lips.

Pappy's fiddle stilled, and he rapped on his peg with his bow—time-honored signal for the dance to cease.

"That's right, stranger," he piped, hospitably. "Make yourse'f right to home.

"You too, mister," turning to the other. "He'p yo'se'f t' what y' kin see. Plenty t' eat in the kitchen. Dance when y' git good 'n' ready."

"Right you are, old top," answered the swaggerer on the hearth, as he refilled his gourd, grinning delightedly. "Right good suds at that, if anybody should ask me. Here's how!"

Still grave, unsmiling, the other stranger stepped before Pappy and gracefully extended a white hand.

"My name is Bradley, oil promoter, from Tulsa.

"Our car broke down over on the highway—motor burned out, I'm afraid.

"We heard your music, and followed it up here. If any one here can give us a tow to a repair station, we should be very glad to pay well for the accommodation."

Pappy shook his head dubiously, and Luke Haskell put in.

"Sorry, stranger, but there hain't no cars on the ridge. No way fur 'em t' git here. Danny 'n' me left our tin Liz over by the big road, an' walked, same as you did. Which way y' travelin'?"

"We came from Lufkin, bound for Tyler. We'd like to get to a repair station tonight, if there's a way, and there usually is."

Luke disagreed—

"I'm afeared this is one time that they hain't no way. Might a car come along the highway any time, but it hain't probable. Better make a night of it, an' ketch a tow in th' mawnin'. Be plenty cars goin' your way then. They's a good repair man at Seminole."

Reluctantly Bradley removed his overcoat, and seated himself in a corner, evidently content to be a spectator.

The big man on the hearth was of a different mind.

Filling his gourd for the third time, he waved it aloft.

"I'm Maxwell, 'Big' Maxwell from everywhere, goin' to the same place. That's th' reason I'm always at home, when I get my hat off. Here's to the man that made this stuff, an' the pretty girl I'm goin' to dance with. Yank us out a tune, Dad. My feet's itchin'!"

"Git y'ur pardners fur a waltz," called Luke, and Pappy tucked his fiddle under his jaw and swung into his pet round-dance tune, "Rose Waltz."

The chuffiest Underhill boy loped across the floor, slid to a stop beside Nell Whitaker, grasped her slim waist discreetly, and swung into it.

Bailey Junior, just out in society, celebrated his début by appropriating the district schoolma'am, horribly embarrassed, but with the air of one determined to go through with it.

Danny Simmons started toward Edna in a matter-of-fact way, then stopped, to frown momentarily as Big Maxwell suddenly seized the prize, without having asked permission, and went rollicking off like a great, playful bear, with a fawn in his embrace.

Danny paused, irresolute, then extended his arm to another girl.

The flatwood had its conventions, its etiquette, its code; but stranger was a holy word, and hospitality must make allowances.

As to Edna, she danced demurely with the stranger, as a matter of duty, smiling apologetically at Danny as they passed, as if saying:

"You know how it is. I couldn't refuse."

The next number was a quadrille, and Maxwell again sought to appropriate the host's daughter, but the girl mustered the courage to tell the first polite white lie of her young life.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Maxwell, but I've promised this to Danny."

"All right, kiddo, but remember, I'll be after you again before long, so don't do too much promiscuous promisin' or you may have to break some of the promises."

Danny's forehead creased again, and he took a step toward Maxwell, but the latter had turned his back and was lumbering to the kitchen for food.

Danny started to follow, but Luke Haskell caught his eye, shook his head warningly, and bellowed suggestively—

"Fu'st couple lead off t' th' right!"

DANNY and Edna were a first couple.

Just as the dance started, Bradley deserted his corner, and strode over to the mantel, where Maxwell joined him, munching his sandwich, and indicating his preference for Edna by waiting out the dance.

Evidently at Bradley's suggestion, the two went outside, to return presently, Bradley serene and casual, Maxwell sulky and black-browed.

The tension in the little cabin had tightened. At first there had been speculation as to whether Danny and the stranger would fight; now it was but a question as to how long they would postpone the affair.

Maxwell had stepped to the extreme limit allowable under any circumstances; no one expected him to stop there.

Bradley strolled nonchalantly about the room, pausing in the musicians' corner just as the music stopped.

Leaning over, he spoke just loud enough for Luke and the players to hear:

"Hope you'll overlook Maxwell's behavior. He's not a bad fellow ordinarily, but he's been hitting the bottle since about supper time, and when he does that he gets a bit rough.

"I got the bottle off him when we went outside, and he may dance his jag off and behave more decently. I hope so."

Watching the little group at the table, Maxwell caught the significance of their whispered conversation, and his impudent grin showed again.

Looking across to Edna, he called:

"Don't forgit, little one. It's my turn next."

Having no excuse at hand, Edna bowed in answer, and Danny, boiling inwardly, but still without tangible reason for offense, drifted to Luke's elbow, plucked at his chum's sleeve, and whispered—

"Say, who's that big geezer, anyhow?"

"Search me, an' find nothin' o' value. All I know 's what t' other'n said. Oil men frum Tulsie."

Danny shook his head in puzzled fashion.

"I've never been that far away from home, an' I know I've seen that Jasper somewhere, but to save my life I couldn't say where."

Luke nodded to Pappy, and the orchestra shrilled into the opening bars of "Turkey in the Straw." Luke called and talked to his friend in a husky aside:

"*S'lute y'ur pardner!* Lay off 'im, Danny. *Opposite lady!* 'Less he gits real promiscuous. *Balan-sall!* You're an officer now. *Su-wing y'ur pardner, all promynade!*

"Co'se if he fo'ces yu—*Aleeman left*—treat 'im rough. *Grand right an' left!* He's plumb husky, if I know a man when I see 'im. *Fu'st couple lead off t' th' right!* Don't let 'im ketch holt o' yu if y' kin he'p it. *Forwards an' back!* He'll scrap dirty, so look out fur mos' anythin'. *Lady roun' lady an' gent roun' gent!* I'll keep an eye peeled fur 'is gun. *Aleeman.*"

Then it happened.

Mary Underhill left the floor, just after having passed Maxwell in the dance. She sat down in a far corner, cheeks aflame, and the other girls crowded around her with much excited whispering.

The music stopped, and Luke Haskell jumped from the table and caught Danny from behind, as the chuffiest Underhill boy crossed the deserted floor, pale-faced, hopelessly outclassed, but ready to take his beating like the stout-hearted little fellow that he was.

Pappy hopped from the table with surprizing agility and stumped nimbly between them.

"Wait a minute, here!" he squeaked, "I'm the boss o' this here house!"

As two men caught and held young Underhill, Pappy turned to the corner where the women folk were huddled.

"What's the matter, Mary?" he called.

Blushing furiously, Mary kept her eyes on the floor and remained silent, as did all of the other girls. No spoken accusation could have been more eloquent, more damning.

It was Maxwell who broke the silence.

"What's eatin' you, old timer?" he sneered to Pappy.

"Maybe I did pinch the janie a little, an' maybe I didn't; who's got anything to say about it?"

The chuffy Underhill boy broke loose, but Pappy again intervened—

"No fightin' in here, Wes!"

Then, shaking his scrawny fist under Maxwell's nose—

"Git right out of my house, ye skunk!"

Maxwell laughed uproariously, then reached over and cuffed Pappy lightly with his open palm, sending the valiant old warrior reeling toward the rear partition, to sprawl there, forgotten in a moment by assailant and onlookers.

Luke Haskell loosed Danny's arms and charged with a bellow of rage, just as young Underhill shook himself free.

But it was the agile Danny who took Pappy's place before Maxwell.

The big man saw him coming and grinned ferociously. Underhill and Luke fell back promptly, and the feminine sea surged through the kitchen door to safety and sanctity, while the menfolk instinctively ranged themselves along the walls.

As the two squared off, left feet advanced, guards raised, Luke Haskell's big voice boomed again:

"Hold 'er, fellers! Just wait a minute!"

Danny backed away, and turned to look inquiringly at his friend.

Maxwell whirled on Luke, bawling angrily—

"What you buttin' in for?

"I'm gonna whip that rooster, an' no one's goin' to stop me!"

"Cheer up, Mister Man, if you done sot y'ur heart on that. You got my consent t' whup 'im if y'u're man enough, but he's goin' t' git an even break. Y'ur coat's off; give the boy a chanst t' peel hisse'f!"

Maxwell's insolent mouth curled contemptuously, and he rolled up his sleeves, displaying brawny, corded arms.

"He can take his shirt off, if he wants to. The more he takes off the better it'll please me. I want to see the pretty marks I'm goin' to make on his hide!"

Danny removed his coat and vest, and stepped past Maxwell to hang the garments on a peg by the mantel. As he did so, the big man suddenly snapped out his left forearm with a short, chopping motion, bringing the edge of his hand smartly across the nerve center at the back of Danny's head, just where neck and cranium join.

The deadly rabbit punch, never a knockout blow, but known by prize-fighters to cause a partial paralysis of the senses, if not of the muscles, its effect becoming apparent ten to twenty minutes after delivery.

There was a little grumbling and shuffling of feet among the onlookers, but as Maxwell had put but little force into the blow, it was accepted more as a gesture of contempt than anything else.

WHEN the men faced again, Maxwell immediately brought his long right arm around in a scythe-like swing with enormous force behind it. Landed fairly, that awful blow would have caved in a man's skull.

But, although by no means a trained boxer, Danny had a cool head, a keen eye for pace and distance, and, above all, a calm, calculating mind, which enabled him to see the right thing to do and do it, to the utmost limit of his capabilities.

So, instead of dodging wildly or waiting stupidly to be smashed, Danny stepped lightly inside the swing, raised his left elbow against the other's biceps, and smothered the force of the blow, though that big fist flailed on around, landing with a resounding thump on Danny's left shoulderblade.

As the blow landed, and just as the big man was off balance, Danny's right pistoned into Maxwell's torso, just below the juncture of his ribs—a perfectly executed solar-plexus smash which would have put a weaker opponent out then and there.

As it was, the big, rugged fellow grunted with surprize and pain, and brought his left around with another "haymaker," only to be outguessed and caught teetering again, receiving a vicious right and left to the head as penalties.

A half-dozen times, the big man charged, bull-like, without landing anything resembling a clean blow; always the cool, lithe, quick-footed Danny, stepped in and out with split-second efficiency, smothering every attack that he couldn't sidestep, now and then countering, with every ounce of his muscle driving his fist home.

Smiles broke over the faces of the piney-boys, and the volatile Luke Haskell was unable to restrain his enthusiasm when Maxwell, baffled and punished after one of his fiercest rushes, paused in the center of the room, glaring and panting.

"Y'u ast my permission t' whup 'im, an' I told y'u t' go ahead," yelped Luke delightedly. "What y'u waitin' fur? Why don'cha go ahead an' do it?"

At the commencement of the fight, Bradley had climbed to a chair on the table, where he had watched the contest unconcernedly, apparently only mildly interested. Now his quiet, even voice broke in:

"Strange, isn't it, that the Providence which built a fighting machine like that couldn't have put a little more time in on the job, and tamped a little something into the cranium.

"Mr. Haskell, your friend has brains, and that gives him a very distinct advantage over Maxwell, who fights just close enough to rough-and-tumble style to get himself mauled good and plenty, and not close enough to get the benefit of his superior weight and strength.

"Go on, big boy! Fight your own way for a few minutes longer. I'll try to be behind, and catch you when you fall.

"Why don't you lay down now, and get it off your mind?"

The fighters had paused by mutual consent, Maxwell to regain his breath, Danny because it was his strategy to make the other do the leading, then sting him when and where he could.

Whether or not Bradley's apparently impersonal remarks had been intended to carry a hint and a reproof to his companion, none could say. Maxwell may have altered his tactics because he had been out-fought consistently, and even his dull brain had recognized the futility of sparring with an opponent who was a flitting shadow when attacked and a battering ram when attacking.

No matter how prompted, on his next onslaught, Maxwell went into it clawing, instead of flailing, his big hands open, like the paws of a grizzly, seeking to clutch and rend and throttle.

Across and around the room they stamped, Danny ever giving ground, shifting, sidestepping, writhing out of corners, never being a fraction of a second backward in landing a punch when his slow-moving adversary miscalculated a turn or wobbled off-balance in his anxiety to close.

But even a nimble man can not keep away from a slow one forever, in a space as small as the front room of Pappy Besley's cabin. The big man finally forced Danny into a corner, caught one arm, then the other, jammed him against the wall until the cabin shook with the impact, twisted him around, bore him to his knees and commenced to force him backward, with all the power of his mighty strength supplemented by his enormous weight.

The strained faces of the men along the walls blanched, and Luke Haskell's breath appeared to leave his body as Maxwell, looking the cruel killer that he was, turned his right hip to Danny's body, braced back his left foot and gathered for a final heave which it appeared inevitably must crumple and crush back that slender, taut body, tensely arched in resistance.

Then something seemed to snap. Like a tempered spring suddenly released, Danny's body slapped the floor, Maxwell following like a great destructive avalanche of flesh and bone.

But as Danny's hips struck the puncheons, his knees came up at right angles, catching Maxwell fairly in the stomach. As the big man teetered on that fulcrum, Danny swung his knees toward his head, gave Maxwell's elbows a simultaneous jerk in the same direction and heaved mightily upward with his loins.

Still under the impetus of his initial effort, supplemented by additional momentum acquired by Danny's sudden withdrawal of resistance and quick propulsion in the same direction, Maxwell shot forward like a great human log. Instinctively he loosened his grip, but Danny tightened his instead, and the big man's heels went on as his head and shoulders stopped, the result being that he turned completely over, striking full length with a force that threatened to break down joists and flooring.

Relieved again, Luke Haskell whooped edelightedly:

"Worked that old Injun trick, didn't y'u boy? You've run 'is laigs off an' busted 'is wind an' jammed his spine, some miscellaneous! Now go git 'im! It's time fur the big baby t' take 'is nappy-nap. Press the little button, an' put 'is light out!"

Casting discretion to the winds, Danny bored in, jabbing, swinging, upper-cutting landing from every angle, while Maxwell, blood streaming from his puffed face, knees wobbly, breath coming in gasps that resembled groans, backed around the room, fighting back mechanically—game to the core.

DANNY was conscious of no ill. He was marked but lightly and his wind was unimpaired. Yet as he hammered away steadily on that lacerated protruding jaw and the eyes which leered at him from between swollen lids, he became aware of a strange lassitude, a weakness in the arms, an unsteadiness of legs, an inability to gage distance accurately or place his blows effectively.

Unknown to him, that insidious rabbit punch was demanding its toll.

Sensing something wrong, Luke and the other piney boys ceased cheering and stood silent, straining in sympathy with Danny's determined, but unavailing efforts to put over the finishing blow.

Bradley's level voice sounded above the *scuff-scuff* of the tired battlers' feet as they swayed back and forth across the room:

"Grit against beef, you know. One's as near out as the other, but grit carries on, when beef quits cold. Or is it beef?" added Bradley ruminatingly. "It may be pork; I hadn't thought of that."

Maxwell heard, and appeared to rally under the taunt.

But Danny heard too and gathered his scattered senses to meet the big man's challenge.

A big fist landed full on the deputy's cheek, shaking him to his toes, but he wobbled back to the attack raining blow after blow on that ugly bruised face which appeared to float at an indeterminate distance before him.

In a frenzy of desperation, he put all he had into a straight right, and the face seemed to sink slowly backward and downward out of reach.

The room spun around in an unaccountable fashion, and strange noises dinned in his ears, but he still swung his fists methodically, searching for his opponent with his knuckles as well as with his dimming eyes.

Again he glimpsed the face, just a ghostly blur, that was all. Everything else was gray-black, intangible, but he still beat and beat, spurred on by some inner monitor which prompted him to fight and fight and fight.

There came a few blind moments when there was nothing to strike at, then the white patch of a face again, right at his shoulder.

Danny turned and struck madly, felt his arm grasped, tore loose by a miracle of final effort, lashed out twice more, then wilted against his captor, limp, powerless—out on his feet.

A moment so, then the murky mists rolled back, and that face became the countenance of Luke Haskell, and as if from a great distance came the voice of Luke, at once jubilant and comically reproachful:

"Cut it out, y'u consarned catamount! D'y'u wanta lick th' hull derned American public? Y'ur man's been out fur more'n a minute now, an' y'u like t' knocked my nose off my face when I tried to stop y'u 'fore y'u beat down th' walls 'n smashed all the furniture!

"Le's go wash an' take a little nap. Then y'u kin git up an' fight y'use'f fur a while. If they's any one else in reach, it won't be me. I've had mine, thank y'u, but, oh, Danny boy, it sure was wuth it!"

Luke piloted Danny into a rear room, where the womenfolk rushed him, nervously sympathetic, all trying to help at once.

A cold compress applied to the base of Danny's skull afforded temporary relief, and a cup of black coffee rallied his scattered senses so that he smilingly dismissed the fluttering women hovering anxiously about, and soon lay snoring on an improvised pallet, as peacefully as if brawls and bruises were things unheard of.

WHEN Luke Haskell returned to the front room, after having tucked Danny away for the night, Bradley had just secured a gourdful of icy water brought from the spring by one of the boys and was pouring it in a trickle over Maxwell's face and chest.

The big man shivered the length of his

long body, worked his great limbs spasmodically, raised to one elbow and rolled his eyes about the room questioningly, then fell back.

Bradley splashed what water remained in the gourd in the fallen Goliath's face, and he rose and wobbled uncertainly to a chair and sat down heavily.

Bradley's cold, taunting voice cut through the constrained silence—

"Well, big boy, if you've had all you want, I suggest that you wash up and call it the end of a perfect night."

Maxwell's gory face drew into a malevolent scowl and his puffed lips twisted grotesquely:

"I got the worst of it this time, but I'll see that feller again. He can't whip me when I'm right."

Bradley crossed his well-kept hands behind his back, tilted up and down on his toes, gazed musingly at the ceiling and said as if ruminating:

"I said it was either beef or pork. It must be pork; anyway, he's a hog for punishment. Why, man alive, that boy could whip you with his feet tied and with pillows on his hands. The only damage you did was—well, you know all about that rabbit punch and so do I. You couldn't hope to get by with stuff like that for the second time.

"Now get up and wash and try to imitate a human being for a while."

Maxwell obeyed, sullenly enough, splashing prodigously in a basin of warm suds, his coarse countenance finally emerging, swelled and lacerated, but more presentable.

Bradley examined his companion critically.

"Eyes a little out of line, mouth a trifle spread, teeth intact, no bones broken, mentality normal, which means zero.

"While you're still in one piece, and able to travel, I suggest that we move on down to the car, and wait for a tow. It's nearly one o'clock, and I believe the evening is pretty well spoiled for the people here, so let's get out."

Pappy stumped forward impulsively and addressed Bradley:

"I'm right sorry this thing happened, but it 'peared we couldn't he'p it, nohow. Anyhow, you've been a gentleman clear through, so you're welcome to stay on until mawnin', an' your pardner is too."

Bradley thanked the old man politely, but insisted upon going, so the two muffled themselves and prepared to depart.

Maxwell stalked out silently, but, after Bradley had shaken hands all around and passed through the door, the big man reopened it and stuck his head back in.

Pappy had started for the kitchen, and Maxwell hailed him:

"Hey, old pegleg! Let me tell you something, and you too, Mister Smart Man!"—to Luke—"You people all look down on me, but I ain't no bootlegger, at that."

Then, pointing to the keg:

"I'm goin' to report that. Got me tanked, an' then beat me up an' run me off. The grand jury'll hear of this."

Bradley interposed, showing temper for the first time:

"Shut up, you insufferable blockhead! If you don't come on away, I'll give you a mauling myself!"

After the two had turned into the wood trail, Bradley stopped, waved a hand in graceful farewell, and called back:

"Don't worry, folks! He had one kind of a swelled head when he came here; now he has the other kind, and it don't sit comfortable. Thanks for your hospitality, and goodnight all!"

On the moonlit porch, Pappy turned to Luke, anxiety in his voice—

"S'pose he'll turn me in?"

"Reckon not, but o' co'se y'u never kin tell. All of us drinkt out o' that keg, an' none o' us got heelarious. It was that derned bottle o' moonshine that put the loco to 'im. Anyway," added Luke philosophically, "persimmon beer is just persimmon beer, an' I wouldn't worry no hull lot about it.

"However, just to play the thing safe, I'd dump that stuff out to the hawgs, an' burn the kaig. Then if any Federalist comes a-snoopin' round, just keep y'ur mouth shut an' let 'em snoop. They kain't do a thing without evidence.

"As to the sheriff's department, you fellers down here has kep' y'ur word not to still no licker, an' we're a keepin' our'n not to go smellin' roun' no man's house, a-tryin' t' round up somethin' that totes five-eighths o' one percent o' alky an' that goes as she lays.

"You just keep y'ur shirt on, Pappy, an' go git a little sleep. Suthin' 'pears t' tell me that the evenin's merry festivities has been duly concluded.

"They was only a few o' us here t' see it, Pappy, ol' hawse, but our children's gran' children 'll tell their children how Danny Simmons whipped Big Maxwell in a he-man's fight, 'ith all rules mere scraps o' paper, as the Kaiser said, when he rambled into Belgium."

Even as Noah herded the animals into his ark, two by two, so the young folk left Pappy Beasley's cabin to stroll slowly homeward by the various winding woodland trails, any one of which would have been overcrowded had three persons followed it in company.

The lights in the little house winked out, and in the deserted front room the subdued glow of the dying fire with its green backlog cast flickering reflections upon the beamed ceiling—dim afterglow of the brightness which had been there.

CHAPTER III

ON DEVIL'S BAYOU

AT DAYLIGHT, Edna tiptoed to the kitchen to prepare breakfast without disturbing the slumbers of the house guests.

With the coffepot bubbling cheerfully, bacon sizzling, pone browning and eggs ready to meet their doom in smoking grease, she went to call her father. Repeated rappings on his door bringing no answer, she investigated, and found the room empty, the bed unused.

As Edna passed back through the front room, a worried glance at the wall above the mantel where her father's long-barreled, single-shot 45-90 rifle was accustomed to rest on its staghorn support, showed her that the weapon was gone.

Anxious on the instant, she roused the others and rushed to the stablelot to find Pappy's saddlehorse missing, also.

Much agitated, Edna insisted that some one go to the highway, to see if all was well with Bradley and Maxwell.

Pappy Beardsley was an honest, amiably disposed, law-abiding citizen in his own estimation and in the estimate of his neighbors.

But he was a sere emblem of a day when feuds had been sustained, stills had flourished and would-be informers had been granted short shrift.

Pappy's sires and grandsires had 'stilled liquor; he had 'stilled it himself right up to the day when his son-in-law-to-be, Danny Simmons, had become a deputy sheriff and from the old man and the neighbors had exacted a promise that they would build no more pine-knot fires under mash-kettles.

Edna and the two officers had an uneasy fear that the old feudal spirit had flamed within Pappy's withered chest, and that he had shouldered his scarred rifle and gone to assess the penalty which in his younger days had been any good man's answer when some one threatened to invoke the law.

To appease the girl's anxiety and to satisfy his own concealed suspicions, Luke Haskell volunteered to go at once to investigate, leaving Danny to follow as soon as he had breakfasted. If all was well with the strangers or if it appeared that they had departed unmolested, the two officers were to secure their own car, parked where a log-road led off the highway, and go to resume their duties at the county seat.

At least, that was Luke's idea. As to Danny, he had no intention of returning to town, until Pappy had been located.

Accordingly, Luke hastily swallowed a cup of coffee, and set off, munching sandwiches as he walked.

Secretly, Luke was more perturbed than he had cared to admit. The fact was that just as he was about to fall asleep, he thought he had heard a distant shot, but had not been certain of it. Not knowing that Pappy had left the house—if he had gone at that time—Luke had attached little importance to the incident, thinking it probable that one of the homebound revelers had encountered a 'possum, or had fired in sheer excess of youthful spirits, all having left in high fettle, enthusiastic over the thorough, masterly, arm-and-knuckle licking which the popular Danny had administered to the equally unpopular outlander.

The path which Luke followed slanted down the side of the ridge until it came to the bayou, then followed that succession of mucky pools until it reached the highway.

Between path and bayou stretched a narrow mud flat, studded with low-arched mayhaw bushes gathered in clumps, a favorite feeding ground for the neighborhood's hogs when the ripe haws fell in early springtime, their nesting place during the dry fall season.

Leading away from the bayou ran numerous deep-trodden trails which the animals traversed each morning, going to the hills in search of acorns.

Luke was no woodsman, having been prairie born. Still he could read the simpler signs, and his worried look was intensified when he noticed shod horsetracks in the path by which Bradley and Maxwell had gone. Pappy had taken the same route.

Ominous.

Rounding the last turn before the path debouched on the highway, Luke experienced a great relief as he saw two men seated on the runningboard of what he knew must be Bradley's and Maxwell's car, a relief which was but momentary, for as he came closer he saw that while one of the men was Bradley, the other was—could it be?

Yes, there was no mistaking that squat figure in faded corduroys, that familiar battered Stetson with a wisp of forelock hanging below the brim, the long, hoary eyebrows, the spiraling drooped mustache.

Old Bob Forrest, the sheriff, unaccountably here, when he was supposed to be attending to his duties at the county seat.

Sick with renewed apprehension, Luke quickened his steps and hailed:

"'Lo, Bob! What's up?"

By way of answer, the sheriff rose, stepped to the edge of the bank a little way off the path, parted the screen of low-growing bushes, and silently pointed downward.

Stepping up quickly, Luke followed the direction of the stubby, pointing finger.

Sprawled grotesquely on the flat below lay the body of Big Maxwell, the dead eyes staring glassily up at the peaceful morning sky, the big throat mangled and smeared with mingled blood and muddy ooze.

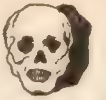
"How'd it happen?"

Luke asked the question mechanically, dreading to hear the answer, but certain what it would be.

Bradley spoke gravely, as one affected by a sudden calamity:

"The old gentleman from the cabin—Beasley I think you called him. He followed us down here last night—I should say this morning, as it was just after one o'clock—and he shot Maxwell right there, and crossed over into the brush on the other side before I could stop him.

"The bullet cut the jugular vein. I tried to stop the bleeding, but it was impossible. I should have reported it at once, but I was a little rattled, almost stunned by the suddenness of it."



LUKE had been gazing steadily at the body, fascinated by the horrid transformation of virile, rollicking giant into an insensate mass of flesh and bone.

Now he started, looked again at the miry ground about the body, and spoke sharply:

"Say, Mr. Bradley! You don't mean to stand there and tell me that——"

The sheriff interrupted:

"Ne'mind, Luke! No use t' stand here talkin' all day. We kin do plenty chinnin' later. How's Danny? This gentleman tells me that the boy an' Maxwell fit, an' that Danny's a little under the weather."

"Danny's all right; he'll be along any time now," answered Luke, "but what I was a-goin' t' say was——"

Apparently unaware that he was interrupting, Sheriff Bob spoke with the brisk air of authority which became him so well in an emergency, and which Luke well knew brooked no delay or idle converse:

"Well, men, it's time we done suthin' 'sides talk. No use t' call th' coroner; it's a plain case enough—just cold murder, an' that's all they is to it or about it. Le's tote that poor cuss up here an' put 'im in my car. It's just out there on the big road. Then we'll hitch this gentleman's car on behin', an' go on in. Wait a minute! Here comes Danny now. May's well let 'im take a little peep, 'fore we disturb anything."

A little wan, but erect and alert, the inevitable 30-30 tucked in the crook of his arm, Danny listened silently, as Bradley recounted the tale of the tragedy for his benefit.

The young officer's dark, wildly handsome face was impassive as he listened, and not a question did he ask; but his keen gaze traveled incessantly, systematically over the flat below.

When Bradley fixed the hour of the killing at one o'clock, Danny looked quickly at the body again, then turned to the sheriff, a question in his eyes.

Having been properly suppressed, Luke said nothing, and the sheriff, apparently unconscious of the unspoken interrogation, repeated his order for the transfer of the body, and the three proceeded with their task.

The other auto was quickly hitched behind the sheriff's car, to which the personal belongings of Bradley and Maxwell had been transferred.

Then Sheriff Bob turned suddenly to Bradley—

"Le'me see y'ur gun."

The request was sharp and unexpected. Bradley flushed slightly, but handed over his six-gun readily enough.

The sheriff raised the hammer and spun the cylinder around, then dumped out the cartridges and looked through the barrel.

"Uh-huh. Clean as a hound's tooth. I thought best t'look 'er over, fur y'ur protection as much 's anything else. You was with 'im when he was plugged, an' folks will talk.

"Bein' a stranger here, I s'pose I'll have to hold y'u as a witness, but that won't be no hardship, as y'u'll have t' wait some little spell fur new parts fur y'ur car."

Apparently absent-mindedly, Sheriff Bob dropped the gun into a capacious side pocket, and turned to give final instructions to his deputies:

"Me'n this man'll go on in now. Luke, pick up a few men and picket this place close. Don't let ary man, woman, hawse or dawg make a track aroun' here till Danny says so.

"Danny, you stay right here an' git this story pat if it takes an hour or a week or a year. That's all I need t' tell y'u. When y'ur ready, come on in an' report. We'll be goin' now."

Bradley hesitated, then spoke as one impelled to mention something which another has overlooked:

"But what about this man Beasley? Aren't you going to send a posse after him?"

Sheriff Bob considered the question with his accustomed air of grave deliberation, then answered reassuringly:

"I reckon that won't be necessary; leastwise, not right away. You're not used t' this country, or y'u wouldn't be oneasy 'bout Pappy tryin' t' leave out fur good.

"A city crook'd try fur a quick getaway, but that ol' feller don't know they is any place ten mile from this flat, so he'll just lay over there in the hills som'ers, an' we kin go arter 'im one time 's well 's another."

CHAPTER IV

AT THE COURTHOUSE

UP AT Seminole, the county seat, Sheriff Bob and Colson, the big, breezy prosecutor, arranged with the judge for the convening of a special grand jury to probe the tragedy and bring an indictment.

Bradley was duly summoned and released on his personal recognizance, his crippled car, a valuable one, being accepted in lieu of a bond, the sheriff retaining custody of it while repairs were being made.

Seminole community seethed with the news that Pappy Beasley had killed a man, and was "layin' out."

Of all the citizens of the little city, Sheriff Bob alone went placidly about his affairs, apparently unexcited by the tragedy and the trouble which had fallen upon an old and esteemed family.

Three full days the deputies remained on the flat. Then they appeared at the dingy old red-brick courthouse, tired, mud-splashed, briar-marked, uncommunicative.

Danny was closeted with his chief for an afternoon, while Luke divided his time between the running of small errands and the artful dodging of some few hundred questions submitted by town gossips who were not contented to know the bare facts, and clamored for the gruesome details.

Luke was a poor liar, but he understood the gentle art of evasion, and knew the sheriff's aversion to taking the public into partnership in working out a crime. So his answers were about as definite and no more reliable than the definitions which accompany a newspaper crossword puzzle.

ON THE fourth morning Colson, the prosecutor, entered the sheriff's dingy, tobacco-reeking office and settled comfortably for a confab.

Colson was a capable practitioner, conscientious, energetic and persistent. He loved the old sheriff as a friend, and respected him as an official, though at times the big, onrushing attorney was irked by the slow-moving, uncommunicative peace officer, who dawdled and smoked and lazed, when energetic action appeared to be in demand.

Now the sheriff sat behind his scarred old pine desk, smoking complacently, while the chafing Colson strode back and forth impatiently, evidently having something heavy on his mind, but doubtful as to how to present it.

After such preliminary hemming and hawing, the prosecutor asked—

"Any trace of Old Beasley yet?"

The sheriff tamped the ashes in his old corncob with a pudgy forefinger and puffed deliberately as he shook his shock head in a slow negative.

"We hain't bothered about him any great lot; reckon we'll fetch 'im in, by-an'-by. Why?"

Colson sat down opposite the sheriff, and proceeded to ease his mind:

"The fact is, Bob, that the officers of the Society for Law Enforcement have been in to see me, and it is their opinion that a reward ought to be offered. Now Bob, I hope you know that I have full confidence in you, but I'm an officer of the society, and they're bringing pressure on me. Thought I'd mention it to you, before anything got to the public. I wish everybody to understand that we are cooperating, as we always have."

Sheriff Bob swung his squeaking swivel chair around, and looked up at the lawyer, his steel-blue eyes showing unwonted annoyance.

"See here, Colson. Do you an' y'ur new-fangled soci'ty think y'u have t' he'p me run this here department? Y'u done give me a warrant fur that ol' feller; that's y'ur part o' the job. We'll fetch 'im in, as we always do; that's our part. What's the rush, an'way?"

"Now, now, old man," replied Colson, bent upon mollifying his old friend. "We're not trying to prod you or anything like that, but this is a national organization with a certain mode of operation, and the local branch wishes to follow that general plan.

"In addition, I might say that it's a new thing here, and we wish to do something to make an impression on the community and set people to talking."

The sheriff leaned back, hoisted his feet to the desk and blew a few smoke-wreaths lazily ceilingward.

His shrewd mind had cut right through the haze of Colson's somewhat lame explanation.

Colson was a politician, as well as a prosecutor. Several local leaders were members of the new-fangled organization, and Colson was playing in with them.

As the sheriff offered no further objection, Colson produced a document and handed it across.

"That's a copy of the notice. See if you have any suggestion to make."

Sheriff Bob donned his brass-rimmed spectacles with their chamois-skin wrapped bridge, spread the paper on the table and commenced to read, following each line through with the tip of his index finger.

Having digested the first few sentences, his brow clouded again, and he spoke with a little asperity:

"There's suthin' that I don't like a little bit. Maybe I'm old-fashioned, but I always have considered that the people pay me an' my deputies for everything that we do, an' in thutty year no man in this department has c'lected a copper outside his salary. If I kin he'p it, we never will.

"This here offers a reward fur the arrest an' conviction o' the ol' feller. That sounds a hull lot like bribery. F'r instance, Danny's sure t' be a witness, an' me'n Luke mout be. I don't like the idee o' bein' paid t' swear suthin' which mout hang or pen a man, 'specially when we have t' hang or pen him to 'arn the money.

"I reckon that's just an old-fogey notion, but it strikes me wrong, that's all."

Colson's active brain quickly found a way out of the dilemma. He knew that the sheriff was wont to hold stubbornly to his position in a case of right and wrong, still he had to put that reward through. If possible he wished to do so without offense to the sheriff's well-known principles.

Easy enough.

Colson took the paper, struck out a line, wrote in a few words, and passed it back.

"There. How does that suit you?

"I've changed it to read, 'arrest and detention,' instead of 'arrest and conviction.' Also, I've made the reward payable to the party giving information, instead of the arresting officer. How does that meet your objections?"

"Plumb bully!" replied Sheriff Bob heartily, after a glance at the amended document, "an' as I try t' keep this department right up t' date, an' rewards 'pears t' be comin' in style, I reckon I'd better post one too, just to sorter show that we're still cooperating as per usual. Stick your'n up any old time; I'l have mine ready in th' mawnin'."

Next day, another wave of excitement swelled, when two notices appeared on the postoffice bulletin board.

The first was neatly typed on the prosecutor's engraved stationery and read:

NOTICE!

A reward of Two Hundred And Fifty Dollars ($250.) is hereby offered for information leading to the arrest and detention of Elijah Beasley, wanted for the murder of H. D. Maxwell.

The Society for Law Enforcement.
By R. C. Stanley, Pres.
Harold Colson, Sec'y-Treas.

The other had been scrawled with a stub pen, in the sheriff's heavy, cramped hand:

> **NOTICE!**
>
> A reward of Fifty cents (four bits) is hereby offered for information leading to the arrest and detention of Pap Beasley, and I consider that a hull lot more than the job is wuth.
>
> (Signed)
> ROBERT FORREST,
> Sheriff.

The amiable Colson looked greatly annoyed when he saw the sheriff's sarcastic notice, but that afternoon he returned before the bulletin, and triumphantly tacked to it a soiled note which had been mailed in an obscure rural box on the day preceeding.

> Mister Colson.
>
> i done it all by mysef, an i dont keer who noes it but i dont whant no other fellers to git blamed. I wont com in, If you whant me youl hev to come kotch me. LIGE BEASLEY.

The grand jury had been summoned to convene on Monday. On the Saturday preceding, Sheriff Bob journeyed unostentatiously down to Hickory Ridge, where he conferred with Edna.

After the officer had departed, the girl saddled a horse and rode across the bayou into the hill country.

That afternoon, Danny Simmons straddled the sheriff's horse and jogged to the flatwood to stay over Sunday with his mother.

The reward for Beasley's apprehension remained unclaimed, and gave no promise of accomplishing anything.

Pappy's friends would have allowed themselves to be boiled in oil before they would have betrayed him; he had no enemies.

The sarcastic notice which Sheriff Bob had posted sufficiently demonstrated his confidence that he would be able to bring the old man in when he got good and ready, which was the only time that the easy-going old officer ever had been known to do anything.

Also, to his credit stood the clearly recognized fact that sooner or later, and in his own way, he always had done everything that needed to be done.

As a consequence, the twin notices tickled the funnybone of Seminole, and for the first time in their years of association a coolness sprang up between the sheriff and the prosecutor.

Throughout all this, Bradley remained about town, recounting the story of the crime numberless times, always expressing the hope that the murderer would be punished.

As per schedule, the grand jury convened in perfunctory fashion to indict Pappy formally. The tale of his confession had spread, Colson having been energetic in advertising it liberally, always with a few accompanying hints that a little more activity by the sheriff's department was strictly in order.

Sheriff Bob and Luke Haskell told of viewing the body, and participants in the dance told of the trouble there. Their testimony came reluctantly enough, but Colson was bent upon establishing a motive, so he probed relentlessly.

Bradley, the star witness, was about to take the stand to describe the actual crime, when there came a slow knock on the courtroom door, and, in his temporary capacity as bailiff, Luke Haskell went to open it.

On the threshold appeared the sheriff, who to that moment had appeared to take little interest in the proceedings.

Crossing the room, he whispered to Colson, who hesitated, frowningly, then announced:

"Mr. Foreman: The sheriff has something of importance to communicate with regard to this case. I suggest that you take a recess until after lunch, when we ought to be able to dispose of the matter within a very short time."

Subtle Colson consented to the delay the more readily because it insured a refreshed and rested jury to listen to Bradley, after the intermission.

Colson passed across the hall first, Sheriff Bob pausing in the doorway to jerk his head to Bradley to follow.

In the office the sheriff appropriated his sacred swivel chair, and motioned the others to seats at opposite ends of the desk.

Colson appeared a trifle bored; Bradley amiable and unconcerned, as ever.

Then business picked right up.

Though apparently uninvited, Luke came in, and behind him came Danny Simmons, piloting Edna.

At the tail of the procession stumped Pappy, awkward and ill at ease in unfamiliar surroundings, a little awed in the presence of the law. A wan, emaciated Pappy, disheveled and frightened.

Danny placed Pappy and Edna by the wall opposite the sheriff's desk, then retired to the rear of the room where he took station between the two windows which gave out on the street, and leaned the beloved little rifle against the wall at his elbow.

Luke Haskell shouldered back the small crowd which had gathered upon sight of Pappy, leaned a chair back against the office door and sat down in it.

Colson's frown still showed, but Bradley glanced up at the old officer in pleased surprize.

"Got him, did you?"

"Uh-huh! That's a habit me 'n' the boys has got when we want anybody right partic'lar."

Feeling somehow that the joke was on him, but secretly pleased that the sheriff had performed true to form, Colson's brow cleared, and he threw out a peace feeler to the sheriff.

"Well, Bob, it looks like you had it on me again, you old miracle man. Produced the needed goods, right when we were thinking that you weren't ever going to get busy."

The sheriff's slow smile was his only answer, and Colson turned to Pappy.

"Are you ready to make a statement? I assume that we have been called in here to take it."

Pappy gulped, swallowed his palate, recovered it by running a finger under the neckband of his shirt and was about to essay speech, when the sheriff's easy drawl cut him off:

"Just a minute. I got a purty fair line on this here thing, and it mout kinda shove matters 'long if I sketch things out. Pappy kin do his talkin' later."

Sheriff Bob stood suddenly erect, and his lassitude rolled off him. The quiet smile deserted his lips, and his genial blue-gray eyes took on a cold, hard, glint.

Banging a fist on the ink-stained desk-top, he almost shouted:

"I've had less t' say about this case than any man in Seminole county, an' it sure is my turn to do a little mite o' talkin', so don't interrupt me, 'cept when y' kain't he'p it!

"This here's the way she was, Colson: This here feller an' 'is pardner left Pappy's cabin, just as he says they did, and they went right on down to where their car was, just as he says they did.

"On the way down the ridge, the big feller ast Bradley fur a drink, an' he give it to 'im. Then they got into an argument 'bout which 'un 'ud keep th' bottle, an' this feller kep' it, bein' able to out-rastle Maxwell, as he was in bad shape arter 'is fight 'ith Danny. Bradley kep' the' bottle, but he lost the stopper."

The sheriff fumbled in his cord vest and produced a small cork, which he laid on a corner of the desk.

"That there'll be Exhibit A"

Colson turned to where Bradley was unconcernedly biting the tip off a cigar.

"Is that correct so far, Mr. Bradley?"

Bradley finished lighting up, then before he could answer, Sheriff Bob's voice rose again:

"Yes, that's right so fur, an' what I say'll be k'rect all th' way down the line. Just let me tell this; then y'u kin examine an' cross-examine everybody in Seminole County, fur all I care.

"As I was about t' say, when they reached the car Bradley was a-carryin' th' bottle 'thout no cork in it, an' t'other feller got arter 'im fur a drink, again, an' Bradley smashed the bottle ag'in a stump."

Sheriff Bob opened a drawer in his desk and produced a knotted bandanna, which he set beside the cork with a jingle of glass.

"That there busted bottle's Exhibit B."

The sheriff addressed Bradley directly:

"You an' Maxwell was chewin' th' rag 'bout his drinkin' an' y'u'd been roastin' 'im 'bout gettin' licked, so when y'u smashed that bottle he got sore proper, an' tried t' gun y'u, but y'u beat 'im to it.

"The big feller's gun was in his hand when he fell. Here's a plaster cast Denny made, showin' th' print o' th' hand an' th' gun in it where he lit, which was right in that leetle swale, 'bout fifty feet from the car."

Bradley flecked the ash from his cigar on a blotter at his elbow, spread it out evenly with a steady hand, and commenced to draw figures in it with the pointed end of a penholder.

Sheriff Bob resumed:

"That plaster cast 's Exhibit C, an' Exhibit D 's this here bullet from y'ur gun.

"It barked a pine saplin' real light, after cuttin' Maxwell's throat, then made a clean hole through a palmetto leaf on beyont. By linin' them two marks up, Danny had no trouble in locatin' th' slug in a dead oak, though y'ud pasted mud over it, an' throwed some road dust ag'in it to make it look old.

"Exhibit C 's this empty shell. You

throwed that down plumb keerless in the bushes."

Colson's face had actually paled as the full significance of the old officer's accusation dawned upon him.

Now he turned to look searchingly at Bradley, who was arranging his tie unconcernedly, apparently unworried.

The sheriff started pacing up and down the room as he continued:

"Here's the fust mebbe-so: Arter th' killin', y'u started to go t' the house an' report it, an' explain that it was done in self-defense, which is exactly what y'u orter done.

"But," continued the sheriff, pausing before Bradley and wagging an impressive forefinger in the other's face to emphasize each word, "you two'd' robbed Hamilton's drug store here in Seminole that night, an' y'u didn't want t' git into the hands o' the law, as a suspect, even if y'u knowed y'u could come clear by tellin' the truth about y'ur scrap 'ith Maxwell.

"Y'u knowed that when y'u took th' stand, which y'ud have to t' prove se'f defense, they'd be questions ast 'bout y'u that mout be awkward, so when Pappy come ridin' along, y'u decided t' lay it off on to him, so y'u hid an'——"

"Just a moment, please," came Bradley's suave voice, "Aren't you indulging wholly in what you call maybe-sos? Do you expect Mr. Colson to swallow all that guesswork, and call it evidence?"

Colson looked a little doubtfully from one man to the other, but said nothing.

Without noticing the interruption, Sheriff Bob continued:

"Y'u couldn't move Pappy's hawsetracks over by th' body, so y'u toted th' body over to where Pappy had crossed th' bayou, an' heaved it off on to th' mud flat. That was some'ers along clost t' sun-up."

"Wait a minute, Bob," interrupted Colson. "Tell us how in the dickens you know that."

Luke Haskell chuckled openly. Danny Simmons threw back his head and roared, something he had not done a dozen times since attaining maturity. Even poor frightened old Pappy cackled shrilly, and Edna giggled in sympathy.

Sheriff Bob gazed upon Bradley, almost pityingly.

"You're a smart man, Bradley, in some ways, an' if 't hadn't been fur one thing, y'ud a got by 'ith the whole business. Yes," confessed the sheriff, "I was a huntin' fur th' fellers that'd robbed Hamilton, but y'd talked an' looked so straight that I'd 'a' passed y'u up an' gone on, 'thout settin' Danny down in them woods, but for that one thing that even a plumb idjit orter 'a' knowed better'n t' tell."

"What was it, Bob?" said Colson, no longer able to suppress his curiosity.

"What was it, eh? Why this poor, ignorant galoot told us that Pappy shot Maxwell 'bout one o'clock, th' body droppin' off th' bank where it lay.

"An', Colson, that same body lay within exactly sixteen an' three-quarters inches o' the trail where more'n three dozen hawgs had traveled that mawnin', goin' t' the hills arter mast, an' there wasn't a dern track t' show that ary one of 'em had turned to the body, or shied away from it.

"Co'se some o' them wild piney rooters 'ud a done one thing, some t'other, but every cussed one of 'em 'ud a done one or t'other. Hawg tracks, Bradley! Just common hawg tracks! Hain't it plumb remarkable how just a few little dents in th' mud git t' be plumb important?"

Bradley yawned, snapped open his watch, and said something about lunch time, then settled back with the resigned air of one forced to listen to something which neither entertained nor amused him.

"Exhibits F an' G," continued Sheriff Bob, "is this here piece o' powder-stained handkerchief an' the twig y'u used fur a ramrod when y'u cleaned y'ur pistol. Danny tells me that it cost 'im more 'n a day to locate the rag. Had t' bail all the water out o' that pool by the highway, fore he c'ud locate it. If he hadn't found it, we'd a been left floppin' with a hole right in the center of our case.

"Shucks, man, do y'u s'pose that 'ith only five or six acres t' kiver, a man like Danny'd let things like that git away? You mout as as well printed all o' it in a book, an' handed it to 'im t' read."

Bradley laughed easily, and lifted his feet to the table.

"Any more interesting exhibits that you know of? Have you anything, in fact, in that pile of junk on the table or elsewhere, that will connect me directly either with the robbery, or the murder?

"It appears to me, Mr. Sheriff, that you are sticking pretty closely to those 'maybe-sos.' Naturally you have to, as there is not a word of truth in anything that you have said."

The sheriff appeared to ponder this statement judicially, then dragged a tightly-rolled canvas bag from an inner pocket.

"It mout be that this here'll be interestin' enough t' keep y'u from fallin' asleep. It's Hamilton's money sack, identified by him as one made by his wife, who swears to it, too.

"Y'u took that out o' Maxwell's pocket arter y'd killed 'im. I ain't goin' t' unroll it. Have t' handle it right keerful. It had blood on it, an now it's carryin' some nice fingerprints, which I'm intendin' t' compare 'ith some o' your'n 'bout tomorrow mawnin'."

The sheriff reseated himself and looking across at Bradley asked courteously—

"Any other questions?"

Bradley shook his head indifferently, yawned again, stretched lazily and as lazily brought his arms back down, starting to rise as his hands reached his sides.

INSTANTLY Sheriff Bob squirmed sidewise on his chair, and his gun flashed out, just as Luke's chairlegs struck the floor with a bang, and Danny's rifle swung across his knees, bearing on Bradley's spine.

"Don't y'u make nary wiggle till y'ur told," grated the sheriff, then his eyes gleamed with involuntary admiration for the man, as Bradley shook his head, smiled whimsically, and said:

"Say when. Fingerprints are old stuff, and I would have burned that sack instead of tamping it into the hollow tree if I had known that a hick sheriff was going to give that woods the third degree.

"But hogtracks form a brand-new complication in my experience, and like many another good man, I fell when I got outside my proper environment. Shall I let this gun drop, or lay it on the table?"

AFTER Bradley had strolled serenely off to jail, a deputy at each elbow, the sheriff ambled over to Edna and drew out his plethoric buckskin wallet.

Delving in, he drew out a half-dollar and passed it to the girl.

"There's y'ur fo' bits; y'u earnt it fair an' square."

Edna smiled shyly, and the sheriff glanced suggestively at the attorney, who had just finished shaking hands with Pappy, congratulating the awed old man upon his complete vindication.

Becoming aware that something was expected of him, Colson looked puzzled, finally asking—

"What is it, Bob?"

"Them there rewards. I just paid mine."

Colson flushed and started to protest:

"Rewards for Beasley? Why we've nothing against him!"

"That won't do, Mr. Colson. Them rewards was fur information leadin' t' th' arrest an' detention o' Pappy, an' Edna done furnished the information, an' Danny arrested 'im, an' there he sets right there in that cheer. If that hain't detainin' 'im, then I don't know how.

"You said that new-fangled soci'ty o' your'n wanted t' do suthin' t' make an impression, an' set folks t' talkin', an' it's my opinion that y'u've done just that. Anyway, there's Pappy, ketched an' delivered, so you owe Edna two hundred an' fifty bucks, spelled out in capital letters, an' then writ in nice figures in parenthesis. Tap the bankroll, an' come clean."

It was a bitter pill, but Colson was a square shooter.

"All right, Bob. Have your own way, as you always do in the end."

He turned to Pappy—

"By the way, what made you write me that letter, confessing to a murder you never committed?"

"Never done no sich," piped Pappy, his wizened old face flushing hotly and anger blazing in his eyes.

"What I meant was that I'd done made that persimmon beer all by myse'f, an' I didn't want any of the other boys t' git blamed fur it, 'specially Luke an' Danny, 'cause they're officers."

"Persimmon beer? What persimmon beer?"

Sheriff Bob beat Pappy to the answer.

"Shucks! Cold tea or suthin' in a kaig down at Pappy's dance, an' th' ol' feller got t' worryin' 'bout it. They's no evidence anywhere, an' they's been no complaint at this office. Any in your'n?"

Colson shook his head mournfully.

"First I'd heard of it. It appears that a conspiracy has existed to prevent me from having any knowledge of the circumstances surrounding this case at a time when said circumstances, particularly the persimmon ale, might have added to my enlightenment and personal comfort.

"No, Mr. Beasley, my department has nothing aginst you—at least, nothing that is covered by statute, though it ought to be. But I suggest that you let this be a lesson to you, and that in future you adopt a policy of open confidence toward me, telling me exactly what you have made, immediately after you have made it.

"Genuine, old-time, frosted-persimmon-and-yam-peeling made by the fireplace by an old-timer and I never knew it until it was all gone. And I thought I had friends."

Then, as another light dawned suddenly, Colson brought a well-groomed palm down with a mighty thwack on the old sheriff's shoulder, and burst forth in assumed rage:

"You confounded, innocent-eyed, deep-plotting old hypocrite! Right while we were discussing the advisability of offering those rewards, you knew that Pappy was innocent, and had run from a shadow. That's the reason why you insisted upon making them read as they did!"

The old sheriff spiraled an end of his mustache around a stubby forefinger, as the hundreds of tiny wrinkles which criss-crossed about his temples embraced and danced joyously, laughing with the kindly steel-blue eyes which they surrounded.

"Well," he drawled ,"bein's y'u accuse me direct, I don't mind admittin' that y'ur what-y'u-may-call-it soci'ty hadn't had no opportunity o' absorbin' as much information as I had.

"Y'u see, Colson, I'd done takent a squint at them there hawg tracks, an' the soci'ty hadn't."

"LONG TIME NO SEE!"

by Charles Nicholls Webb

FRENCHMEN ain't all built that way—
Silent chaps like Slim La Cree;
Most you'd ever hear him say
Was, "By gar! Long time no see!"

Maybe last you'd seen of him
Was a year ago; maybe
Only yesterday, but Slim
Would declare, "Long time no see!"

Quiet, and a good old chum,
Saved my life at Bidwell's Dam;
When I thought my time was come—
Day I got catched in the jam.

Thought I'd gone clean up the spout;
All the boys had give me up,
'Cept old Slim who dragged me out,
Lookin' like a drownded pup.

Worked on Slim fer quite a while—
He was nearer gone than me—
Last he looks up with a smile;
Gasps, "By gar! Long time no see!"

HEADS in a NOOSE

by Fairfax Downey

Author of "To Beat the Band." "The Trophy of the 4th Gun Section."

THE BARON LUDWIG VON HOHENPFERD of Hesse-Darmstadt tugged at his large, yellow mustache, smote his barrel chest, which years ago had been met more than halfway by a capacious stomach, and snorted at the thin young Englishman who stood before him—

"Only twenty casks of red herring and you!"

The baron glared with his pale blue eyes.

"Fish!" he vociferated, and undoubtedly he was speaking inclusively.

Master Christopher Halbird gave back the baron's glare with the deep gaze of one who thinks and even studies, both deemed bootless by the men of action who took toll of the Rhine commerce in the late seventeenth century. The baron was further annoyed.

"I hold you for ransom," he declared, "on the sly word of one of the boatmen who swore there were those would pay it for you. Can there be such dolts? That I misdoubt. Best stretch a rope with you."

"I may yet do you some service," the captive suggested confidently.

The baron fairly snored. If done while he was awake, it was a decided danger signal. It was fortunate that a diversion came in the shape of a hail from the battlements.

At the well-known signal, the baron and all his retainers repaired to the castle walls and eagerly scanned the broad surface of the Rhine below. A fleet of four heavy-laden craft was slowly making its way upstream.

Almost in unison, the eyes of the watchers shifted up and across to the castle facing theirs from the opposite shore. Men-at-arms were streaming down the hill on which it was perched. They swarmed into boats and rowed lustily out into midstream, the sun reflected from pike and sword. A stout figure rose in the bow of the foremost boat and raised a hand, at which a blast of a trumpet sounded. At that the merchant craft obediently lay to and were boarded by the robber baron and his men.

Baron von Hohenpferd paced his battlements raging at the sight.

"Again the luck of the fiend!" he roared. "Always the turn of von Kopflos when the richest prize sails by. My plunder a few wretched herring and a living skeleton of an English clerk. May I sizzle eternally if I do not quit this taking of shares with yon rogue across the river! I'll take mine by force of arms."

Von Kopflos had indeed made a good haul by the look of it. Into waiting boats his men unloaded a proportion of the merchants' goods, bales of silks and of spices, casks of wine and heavy sacks. The watchers on the battlements growled jealousy at the sight. Had it been the first manifestation of ill fortune in booty for the Schloss Erstheim and its garrison, small complaint would have been made. But it was not the first, nor yet the second nor the third. Again and again, the fickle Rhine and its tribute had played false the robber baron on its west bank. Into that greedy hold, Schloss Blaustein, the Baron von Kopflos had raked the spoil from the alternate craft that sailed past, for weeks past always the wealthy ones.

Having yielded the tithe they must, the merchant craft were pérmitted to sail on.

The wrath of von Hohenpferd mounted as he saw them slip away and the high-heaped boats of his rival put back for the east shore. He reached for his long two-handed sword.

"May the —— turn me on a spit, if I longer endure this dupe's treaty!" he vowed. "A pox on this turn and turn about! We row out to the next rich prize, come when it may!"

"Hold hard, my lord," urged a gloomy-looking captain. "If we quarrel with them across the river, we both lose all. The stag slips past while the dogs are at each other's throat. Our ill fortune must soon alter."

The baron hesitated. It was evident he was thinking painfully.

"You speak sooth, good Gebhard," he finally admitted with reluctance. "We should make quick riddance of yon crew of cutpurses. Yet might they shut themselves up in their hold on the hill. And there is a hard nut for the cracking."

"Faith, yes," the captain agreed. "Castles are strong and few are skilled in siegecraft. Let us await the turn of our luck, my lord."

A hearty laugh echoed along the battlements. The baron and his men stared angrily. It was the Englishman.

"Ha-ha-ha!" he chortled. "Wait for the turn of your luck, will you. You'll wait a year and a day and then a day and a year and then— Ha-ha-ha!"

The baron turned an apoplectic red. He was past speaking and only able to form a loop with his hands and point to his throat.

A retainer of understanding proceeded to fetch a rope. He tossed it over a projecting beam and commenced to knot a noose. The businesslike preparations restored his speech to the baron.

"Your ransom, young Master Halbird, whatever its size, could not pleasure me so much as the present stretching of your neck. If you are done with your mocking of us, you would do well to say a last prayer."

The Englishhman only looked more thoughtful. Two bowmen who had him by the arms thrust him beneath the beam. A hoarse growling ran through the ranks of the men-at-arms. This scrawny clerk had dared make sport of them, dared trifle with tempers gone raw after weeks of scanty gleanings from the Rhine. Up with him! Let him swing!

The noose was around his neck when he casually but clearly remarked:

"I mocked you not. I laughed that I knew the manner another mocks your earnest endeavors on the Rhine. A pity that I must die and you may not share the joke. Faith, it is a droll one! Ha-ha!"

The effrontery of the clerk won him a respite. A stout-hearted fellow or a fool. The baron gazed at him sourly. He maintained no jester, did the baron, thinking one a waste of money. He made to order the hanging to proceed.

"The joke is as comical as it is costly to you," Halbird put in quickly.

The pale blue eyes of the Baron Ludwig von Hohenpferd lit up.

"If this jest of yours is to my taste, you need not swing," he promised. "Take warning. Few jests are."

"Learn then of the mirthful ways of Baron von Kopflos, your neighborly ally. The baron does more than trust a kind Providence. He aids her. So to him fall all the rich prizes.

"Forsooth none tells you that a steward of the baron's takes his station at the next town above on the river and that he has a fellow likewise in the nearest town below. These accost the river merchants whose cargoes are of greatest value and promise them that if they do but delay and sail on past the castles when given the word, a smaller proportion of their goods will be exacted.

"How now, my lord Baron. Think you these stewards say aught to the merchants who sail with cargoes skimped and of little worth? Not they. They let them pass on with never a word. But after them, spaced alternately, sail the spice and silk ships, which by your treaty of turn and turn about fall to the lot of the forehanded lord across the river. So I learned by chance words overheard in the town downstream. Ha-ha-ha! Did I not tell you it was droll?"

But the listening company did not echo his mirth. Came an angry roar from a hundred throats. Shaking with fury, the Baron von Hohenpferd caught up his great two-handed sword and brandished it at the castle across the river. His retainers grasped pike and crossbow and commenced a rush for the armory.

"To arms!" rose the cry. "Tumble the castle about their ears! Slay the traitors!"

The captain, Gebhard, looked about him gloomily.

"This is folly," he muttered to the Englishman. "It will be all our deaths. An unorganized assault against a stronghold. Fools!"

CHRISTOPHER HALBIRD made no answer. He watched the captain, an old soldier trained in the wars, protest vainly to the furious baron. The treachery had hit him in a vulnerable spot. It had halted his gathering of treasure. Money was the power which would buy him mercenaries and sway over broad lands. He was ambitious, was the Baron von Hohenpferd.

The Englishman observed the wild confusion, a curious smile curving his lips. He looked more thoughtful than ever.

Some one raised a battle chant. Led by the ponderous baron, the excited garrison moved toward the stairway.

Then the front rank halted and backed up sharply. The rear rank jammed up on their backs; then recoiled, too. There was a hush of superstitious awe.

This all at the sudden apparition at the head of the stairs of a gaunt old man, with flowing gray beard. A black skull cap sat upon his head and he was attired in voluminous robes of black, worked over with cabalistic designs in silver thread. The long arms of the graybeard were thrust aloft and his eyes gleamed wildly with the light of a supreme triumph.

"*Eureka! Eureka!*" he shrieked at them.

The martial clamor of the soldiery died away into uneasy muttering.

"'Tis Master Festus, the alchemist," Gebbard whispered to the English stranger.

"*Eureka!*" the ancient gibbered, advancing on the baron.

"How now?" quoth the baron stupidly.

"He says he's found it," Halbird translated.

"Found what?" asked the baron, whose mental processes were not equal to the sudden shift.

More calm now, the alchemist became intelligible to all.

"The Philosopher's Stone!" he cried. "Years of toil have given me the great secret at last. I can transmute the baser metals. I can change all into gold, gold, gold!"

He capered about rheumatically.

The baron was with him now.

"Then I have not maintained you all these years in vain," he declared.

"Not in vain have I stewed over my furnaces these many years," the alchemist amended.

"Speak out. Tell all—since you have thus begun," the baron ordered.

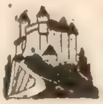
"I had worked on too petty a scale," Master Festus related amid a breathless silence. "At length I built a giant furnace and alembic and fused many metals with quicksilver into a great mass. A small portion thereof flamed brightly in the liquids of my crucible and gold remained. Gold pure by all tests!"

From his robes, he drew forth a gleaming yellow nugget and put it into the Baron's hands. At that, doubt disappeared. The baron commanded his men to lay down their arms. Why quarrel over merchants' packs when he possessed the sinews of an empire?

"To the banquet hall! Wine!" he roared.

Christopher Halbird watched the rout cascade down the stairs. He did not look as thoughtful as usual. He looked puzzled.

§ II



PEACE reigned between the rival robber barons. Without dispute, the doughty von Kopflos and his men sallied forth from Schloss Blaustein and took toll of all the shipping that passed up or down the River Rhine. The ambitious von Hohenpferd sat at his ease in Schloss Erstheim, reveled with his men and watched with equanimity the comparatively retail endeavors toward enrichment conducted by his neighbor in the old-fashioned piratical way. What other lord in all Christendom had in his service an alchemist who had achieved the *magnum opus*, who ever and anon chipped a bit from the metal mass of the philsosopher's stone and by its magic made gold?

True, it was not quite enough ever and anon that the nuggets were forthcoming, but Master Festus waggled his gray beard and gave assurance that in time his research would increase his transmutations in magnitude and speed of accomplishment.

With that the baron was satisfied, especially since the alchemist had announced that he approached another discovery of prime importance. He was on the very verge, he vowed, of concocting the elixir of life. He had invited the baron into his fearsome laboratory one day where all manner of strange apparatus lined the dark stone walls and dried snakes and bats and a stuffed crocodile hung from the ceiling. Murmuring an incantation over a beaker of liquid, Master Festus had bade the baron drink. The baron did so and paid the alchemist the rare tribute of choking over the brew, something he seldom did.

"May the —— parboil me," the baron swore later, describing the experience, "if ever so heady a potion burned my gullet before! The elixir is yet imperfect. The years rolled back on my shoulders anon but by the black rood! for a time it made me feel exceeding young."

Master Halbird, the English clerk, still held for ransom though become a very minor issue, was sceptical of this as of the other discovery in the realm of alchemy. He had given up his habit of meditation for a keen watch which he kept on the castle across the river. But for his learning, this clerk might have been a soldier.

It was he early one morning who roused the sleepy guards and charged them raise the drawbridge for their lives. It was not a second too soon. The Baron von Kopflos and his retainers, reinforced by a strong band of mercenaries, had reached the very moat's edge in a surprize attack.

Two such great secrets as Schloss Erstheim held could not be kept. Who would not strive to make his own the keys to gold and youth? Suspicions aroused by the abstinence of his neighbor from river plunder, the Baron von Kopflos had learned of the astounding success of Master Festus, the alchemist. Now in his simple, direct way, he had come to place in his own service the graybeard and his precious knowledge. His profit from the Rhine had given him funds for mercenaries to lay siege. Only the alertness of some one in the castle had made that necessary.

Trumpet blasts summoned the garrison to arms. The two barons defied each other in the customary manner; then stepped back into safety as their musketeers played away and bowmen loosed showers of arrows. The besiegers drew off and commenced the work of investing the castle in a scientific manner. Apparently some captain among the mercenaries was versed in siegecraft.

Clearly this siege was to be a matter of dispatch. Old von Kopflos knew that an extended affair would attract undesirable attention and draw roving bands from over the countryside to be in at the sacking. Soon so many mercenaries would place themselves on his pay roll that the utmost efforts of the yet uncaptured alchemist would be required day and night to satisfy their greed for gold.

So the besieger was prepared. At hand were his scaling ladders, his pent houses, his cats and his catapults. Von Kopflos was of the old school; besides, his gunpowder supply was scanty. Bundles of brush, ready prepared, had half filled the moat at two points during his initial onrush.

In the armory, the Baron von Hohenpferd took counsel with his captain and under-officers.

"Defend me this castle and its wealth, Gebhard, I charge you," he besought that soldier. "Think of the philospher's stone," he moaned.

"That I'll essay, my lord," declared that captain stoutly. "Alack, that in all my battles ere this, I have served with the besiegers, not the defenders."

"——'s fire!" the baron roared. "You have but to do the opposite of what you did."

But Gebhard's countenance bore signs of the deepest gloom.

The baron snored raucously. Crossbow bolts and musket balls beat a tatoo on the walls, punctuating the shouts of the besiegers. Smoke curled in through the pierced windows. The ordnance was scarcely replied to from the castle where the gunpowder lay decayed and useless. It had gone neglected in the wine-cellar.

"My lord!"

It was that English clerk again.

“No soldier, I,” he spoke calmly, “but my studies have informed me somewhat in siegecraft as the art was known to the ancients. Might I——”

“May the —— boil me in oil——”

“— but direct the defense, the castle and its secrets might be preserved. Archimedes at Syracuse——”

The baron cast about for his sword, sputtering inarticulately.

“Who else is there, my lord?” Gebhard asked pessimistically.

At that, the baron yielded with a helpless gesture. The young Englishman hastened to the battlements.

III

“THE moat is filled. They have a pent house against the wall!” a soldier shouted to Halbird.

“The ancients cast stones down upon such,” the clerk recalled.

“Few stones are at hand within the walls,” the man shouted again.

“Our catapult lacks stones,” Gebhard called, running up. “The enemy’s engines two to one, are overwhelming it.”

Halbird looked particularly thoughtful. Finally he advised:

“Tear down some of the masonry to furnish them.”

Men grasped tools and ran to obey his orders.

Against the east wall, a ramming cat thudded and clawed as the men of von Kopflos swung it under the protection of the pent house.

“Ah!” the clerk exclaimed. “Now it comes to me how the ancients coped with that.”

He ran to the battlements immediately above the threatened point. A group of soldiers huddled there helplessly. One had only to show his head to draw a cloud of arrows from the besiegers.

“Bring me a rope,” Master Halbird commanded in a strange unscholarly voice. “Best the one with which you were near to hang me, knave,” he added, recognizing the bowmen who had made ready the rope that first day of his imprisonment in the castle.

The fellow rushed back with the rope, the noose still in it.

“Good!” the clerk exclaimed. “Twenty stout pikemen stand by to lay hold. Archers, in readiness for a mark below. Now two of you cover me with your shields.”

He advanced to the parapet, leaned over and lowered the noose end of the rope. Arrows rattled like hail on the shields before him. Quickly he paid out the rope. The enemy in the pent house below drew back the ramming cat for another thrust at the battered wall. Halbird lowered again and the head of the cat jammed into the wall through the circle of the noose which the clerk jerked tight around it.

They hauled the snared ram up, up till it struck the roof of the pent house which it overturned, leaving the men beneath gaping stupidly upward.

“Archers,” Master Halbird suggested calmly. Advancing, they loosed a flood of shafts into the easy targets below.

A soldier came running to report a second ram was breaching the south wall. The clerk turned to an under-officer who had been at his side.

“Must I read the same lesson twice?” he asked caustically. “Go with him.”

Halbird himself made haste to the one catapult which the defenders possessed. It had been abandoned because of lack of stones to cast and the fire of the enemy’s engines, soldiers explained.

“Fools and cowards! The one remedies the other,” he barked at them. “Cast back the stones they hurl. Tear more stones from the masonry. Search the halls for weights to hurl!”

Under his lashing, the arm of the catapult drew back again. All manner of missiles, from iron-bound chests to heavy stools, began to hurtle toward the crude tower the foe was raising to storm the east wall.

From the south, the battle-cries and the clash of weapons redoubled, and the Englishman dashed for that corner of the keep. As he came up, inner gates clanged shut, the gloomy Gebhard just winning through with hostile pikes inches from his back.

“We had only a score of men here. They carried the outer wall by scaling,” he gasped. “Throw up a barricade!”

His men labored frantically to strengthen the gate through which the amply armored form of the doughty Baron von Kopflos could be seen urging his troops on.

“All goes well elsewhere,” Halbird shouted to him above the uproar. “Methinks the ancients would sally forth here and fall upon them before more come up.

Marshal them, Gebhard. I go to seek the baron to close the trap on them."

Through court and castle the Englishman searched in vain. At last he heard a thunderous snoring. Good. The Baron von Hohenpferd was in a warlike mood.

Alas, no! He was asleep, his mountainous form recumbent on a table just without the entrance to the laboratory of the alchemist.

At the sound of the approach of the clerk, Master Festus rushed from his den. His face was pallid, his long beard and black robe in disarray.

"Spare me! Blame me not!" he screamed.

"What have you done? Halbird demanded sternly.

"Naught, naught. My lord sought me here. He swore a monstrous rock from a catapult had fallen but an ell from him. In the fear of death, he seized and quaffed all yon jar of my elixir of life."

Master Halbird choked down vast mirth.

"If you would live, graybeard," he ordered with seeming fierceness, "cook me all your great vats full of Greek fire such as the ancients poured down upon besiegers. Straightway!"

The alchemist stumbled back into his laboratory and commenced a noisy clattering. Failing to rouse the Baron, Halbird returned to the defense.

Rams still battered at two walls but with difficulty, for they were hard put to it to avoid nooses lowered from above. But in the breached quarter, a second assault with scaling ladders was preparing. Von Kopflos and his minions in spite of their losses were elated by their piercing of the outer defense. And the tower before the east wall still survived the marksmanship of the catapult of the besieged.

The afternoon wore on. The besiegers grew desperate to take Schloss Erstheim before nightfall. Covered by their bowmen, the assailants swarmed up into their completed tower from which they could command the castle and sweep the battlements clean with their arrows. It was a critical moment.

Then the crack of the castle catapult was heard. From its arm, a heavy mass rose in a graceful parabola, soared over the wall and crashed through the structure of the tower, toppling it, with the men upon it, to the earth.

The cheers of the defenders were stilled by piercing shrieks from a black-clad figure which rushed from a door. It was Master Festus, the alchemist. He beat his head and rent his beard.

"Wo! Wo!" he howled. "You have cast away the philosopher's stone!"

The general consternation was diverted by a messenger from Gebhard. Von Kopflos was attacking the inner defense.

"Follow me. Bring the Greek fire from the laboratory," Halbird shouted.

While soldiers were hurrying out the vats, the Englishman made a last effort to bestir the prostrate von Hohenpferd.

"The enemy is on the walls!" he yelled into the nearest baronial ear.

"Cupbearer fill," remarked the baron sleepily.

The Greek fire was soon in place to be emptied upon the heads of the foemen. Torches were put to it. Nothing, nothing at all happened. With a look of guilty panic, the watching alchemist scuttled off.

"As false as his gold," Master Halbird laughed.

IV

BUT the inner defenses continued to hold. Although the Greek fire had failed to take light, the ingredients of which the alchemist had compounded it had been unpleasant enough to rout the scalers, coughing and sputtering. At other points, too, attacks were repulsed until darkness fell, due to the erudition of Master Christopher Halbird in the siegecraft of the ancients.

Schloss Erstheim, however, was in a sorry state from the battering of the foe on its old crumbling walls and from the fact that everything that was loose or could be loosened had been hurled at the besiegers. None disputed the depressing prediction of Gebhard in the quiet of the evening that the next day would see the stronghold's fall.

The sadly depleted garrison gathered under the flickering torches of the armory looked half hopefully toward the English clerk who had led them through that long, hard-fought day. Were their comfortable years of helping themselves to their living from the Rhine traffic to end like this? Must they be cast out upon the countryside? Must they be reduced to mere toil? An appealing look marked each ruffianly face turned toward him.

"What would you have of me?" Halbird

flung at them. "Where is your liege lord? Go bring him to give you counsel."

They brought him, four of them straining in bearing the chair he lolled in. Not yet had the elixir of life worn off and returned him to the cares and sorrows of this world.

The Baron Ludwig von Hohenpferd looked about him with an air of great contentment. His attitude was jaunty, his gestures jerky but magnificent. His entire aspect as he rolled his great bulk about in the chair in several unsuccessful attempts to rise was youthful, almost kittenish.

In a solemn voice, Gebhard narrated to him the events of the day, like a professional mourner giving a reading from the Book of Job.

"And now, my lord," the captain finished, "what course is best? What would you choose?"

"*Wein, Weib und Gesang,*" gurgled the Baron happily, to quote him exactly. "Wine, women and song, lads," he roared.

"Bear him away!" Gebhard growled. Exit the baron in chair, singing. "Now, Master Captain of the Siege, give us your rede."

"Hear then," Halbird bade them. He spoke tersely and quickly. When he had finished, the old hall rang with the garrison's cheers.

"But the gold he makes?" one objected.

"The old mummer got no more gold from his crucibles than he first slyly placed in them," Halbird grinned.

No one said more. Thereupon after a rush of preparation, these events befell with great suddenness in the still of the night.

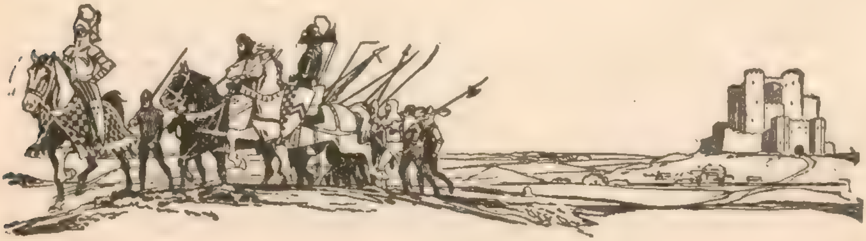
Out broke a loud clashing of arms, blast of trumpets and shouts of battles. Two great bonfires burst into flames upon the towers above the main gate. Down banged the drawbridge and a black-clad figure with flying gray beard dashed out at the impetus of a pike. Away through the forest the alchemist coursed, von Kopflos and his men in pursuit of the supposed prize.

By the time they had caught the old fraud, the besieged garrison had issued from the postern gate and stolen down to the river. By the time they had come stumbling back in the dark, the besieged had crossed the river and put the torch to Schloss Blaustein. That ancient hold, no more capable of withstanding siege than its sister castle, burned like tinder. In the confusion, the still unransomed English clerk was lost. Von Hohenpferd and his diminished troop disbanded and melted away through the countryside. Their refuge destroyed, von Kopflos and his marauders could do no more than follow suit. For robber barons berefit of their castles were Samsons slain. The right to have and to hold river toll about as watertight as a sieve.

MASTER CHRISTOPHER HALBIRD, domiciled in a Rhine town near the smoking ruins of the two castles, received a messenger a few days later. The man came from a powerful guild of merchants wont to ship cargoes of value upon the River Rhine. The message read:

> To our ears comes word of your success in setting the robber barons upon one another and ridding us of their extorions. Your past record for valor in the wars is matched only by your craft. Take what ship you may downstream and claim of us your reward of four chests of golden ducats.

Master Halbird's countenance resumed its habitually thoughtful expression. He was wondering how soon he could get a boat down the river.



HARD WOOD

A THREE-PART STORY
PART II

by Arthur O. Friel

Author of "Cat o' Mountain," "Mountains of Mystery.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form:

WHEN Harry Wood and his mother first went to live in "The Traps," up in the New York hills, he fell foul of Jerry Cooper, and thrashed him so completely that he earned for himself the name of "Hard Wood." Steve Oaks bestowed the name on him, and Steve was a good judge of men. The same day Jerry Cooper was nicknamed "Copperhead," for he tried to strike from behind, without warning.

The whole Cooper tribe, there were seven of them, took up the feud but, thanks to Steve's intervention, a deadline was drawn—Hard Wood agreed to avoid the Cooper clearing, they agreed to keep away from the Wood homestead.

So matters drifted on for four years. Hard Wood grew to manhood. He became, indeed, hard, grim and quiet, swift to anger. The Traps people feared him and he had but two friends; Steve Oaks and old "Uncle" Eb, with whom Steve lived.

Then Mrs. Wood died. After the funeral Hard Wood left the Traps and tramped away through the woods, wandering from village to village as far as Kyserike. Here the memory of his mother's death was brought back to him when, on a scrap of newspaper, he read an account of a cure performed by a New York specialist on a wealthy inhabitant of Kingston. If he, too, had had money perhaps his mother might have been saved!

Eager to see his home again, he hurried back, only to find the house burned down. Instinctively he blamed the Coopers. His conviction became a certitude when he failed to find in the debris any trace of his mother's brass-bound chest.

He went to live with Uncle Eb and some days later, armed with a club, he slipped away to reconnoiter the Cooper clearing. When near the cabin he saw a girl coming toward him. It was Jane Cooper. He saw that local gossip was right: The girl was blind.

Unaware of his presence she sat down on a fallen tree-trunk and at her call birds and small wild creatures came to her. Suddenly Hard Wood saw a bobcat strike down a rabbit which had been close beside the girl. Terrified, she stood motionless, while the bobcat, maddened by the taste of blood, crouched, ready to spring. Hard Wood leaped forward and dispatched the animal with his club.

In its death agony the cat mauled Hard Wood's legs so that he was compelled to go back to Uncle Eb's and remain inactive for several days. During this period the shrill presence of Uncle Eb's wife so exasperated him that on recovery he went to live alone in a well-hidden cave in the hills, where he decided to stay until he could square accounts with the Coopers.

In his rocky home he slept soundly for the first time in weeks.

CHAPTER IX

A LESSON IN ETIQUETTE

IN THE brilliant sunshine of a new day, Hard stood on the brink of Dickie Barre and looked abroad. He had found, a few rods to the north of his covert, a difficult but passable route to the top of the cliff; and now, squinting against the dazzling light, he was surveying the entire eastern panorama of the Traps. The southern and western triangle was blocked from his view by a tree-clad rise on the summit at his right.

He had made the ascent, not to gaze at scenery, but to pass over to Peters Kill by the shortest route. Yet the view visible from this point had compelled him to pause for a time. The long, densely wooded sweep of Mohonk, the little farm patches and doll houses along the creek, the thread-like road, the southern swing of the gray rock-rim

"Hard Wood," copyright, 1925, by Arthur O. Friel.

enclosing all, and, beyond, the glimpses of the farther hills rolling away to merge into misty blue sky—these held him quiet for unmeasured minutes. At length he drew a slow, deep breath.

"It's God's country, sure 'nough," he muttered. "Onliest thing the matter with it's some o' the varmints that live into it."

He scowled toward the south as he spoke; toward the south, where, beyond the intervening rise, dwelt the Cooper tribe. His hand closed a bit more firmly on his gun. His objective that morning was that Cooper land, and he intended to go armed with something better than a club.

After a moment, however, another expression came into his face. The scowl faded. His eyes roved slowly back along the vista.

"Think o' livin' into all o' this an' never seein' it!" he thought. "Never even seein' the crick 'longside o' yer own house, or the birds that come to ye, or the squir'ls—or nothin'. Nothin' but jest black. By mighty! It's like Steve says. I'd ruther be dead, ten times."

Another thoughtful period. Then his back stiffened, and he swung about. Into the wilderness of trees and underbrush he strode, heading southwest.

Some time later he emerged from the brush beside noisy Peters Kill, a little north of the road. As he worked along the stones, a glint of sunlight flashed from his swaying gun-barrel into his eyes. He blinked, frowned, stopped.

"I dunno," he reflected, studying the weapon and moving it about. "That'd be a dead give-away if it happened over yender. Sun's too darn bright— There!" Another gleam had darted from the steel. "That's twice in a couple o' minutes. Hum!"

He considered briefly; then picked a near-by scrub pine, went to it, and laid his gun in the branches. The firearm would be more or less in the way, anyhow. His present purpose was not to attack the Cooper house, but to "git the lay" of the place, which he had failed to do previously, and to gain whatever information he could. Although he supposed the Cooper girl had "blabbed" about his previous visit, he saw no reason to expect discovery by her men today, so long as he kept under cover. She knew nothing of his identity.

So it came about that he again crossed the deadline unarmed.

As before, he skirted the upland lake and descended the brook ravine without meeting any sign of man. This time not even a snake disputed his approach; and he cut no club. Once more he found the little path and stole along it, eyes and ears alert for any lurking form or stealthy movement behind tree or stone. He detected none. Nor was the girl again at her log or anywhere along the track.

Soon he rounded the bend where she had faded from view. There he slowed. Only a short distance farther on, the path crossed the creek by a short bridge and opened into a cleared space; and some way off, beyond a couple of sprawling rocks, was visible the roof of a house.

From behind a bush at the end of the path he scanned the clearing. It was rocky, like all Traps farms, but fairly level, and, if worked faithfully, would have made a productive piece of ground. Yet, with five men available for its cultivation, it looked unkempt. Most of it seemed to be devoted to the growing of corn, but the maize, though thick, was straggling and weedy; and none of the five men for whom it grew was in sight. The only moving creature visible, in fact, was a gangling black colt, grazing near the house. The house, so far as could be seen from this point, was a paintless, drab structure of a story and a half, backed by a dingy red barn.

It stood only a stone's throw from the trees clothing the Minnewaska slope. Toward that slope the observer began moving through the scrubby cover. Within a few rods he was ascending the grade, and soon he turned again to the north. A little later he stopped beside a tremendous boulder, which bulked high from the steeply slanting earth and was nearly surrounded by shaggy pines. The Cooper dooryard was directly opposite him.

Still nobody was visible. But for the facts that the colt and the fowls were outside and the front door stood open, the place would have seemed utterly deserted for the day. After a short period of watching, the scout moved around the huge rock, making sure that no man was on or near it. In so doing, he learned that it was split apart as if by a gigantic ax, forming a miniature cañon some ten feet wide, facing toward the house. The same force which had smitten it asunder had also thrown queer blocks of detritus between the severed halves. In among these he crept and, picking the best vantage point, settled down to watch and listen. He had a feeling that the house was not empty.

As he lay there, slowly surveying the shiftless buildings and the ill-kept corn, a vague suspicion which he long had held grew into a practical certainty. These Coopers never worked outside; they evidently worked little here; yet they owed no money, so far as he knew, and seemed to get along. They certainly did not starve. All the men were beefy and strong, and the girl, though slender, was healthy and evidently well fed. How did they do it? Not by selling an occasional wagon-load of charcoal. And what did they do with so much corn? Put it into jugs, of course. They were moonshiners.

This answer made perfectly plain both their ability to live without the usual forms of toil and their hostility toward visitors. It made plainer, too, the reason why Bad Bill had so phrased his warning on drawing the deadline—the warning delivered in the hearing of Steve Oaks. Those words still stuck in the watcher's memory; and he could see now that, for Steve's ears, they were meant to excuse the Cooper gun-play on the ground that he, a newcomer, was "sneakin' 'round." He remembered also that Steve had allowed the incident to rest there and had virtually supported their dictum against crossing the line. Although Steve was not in league with the Coopers—the thinker felt sure of that—he undoubtedly knew their trade.

So far as moonshining was concerned, Hard still held his previous views. It was honest enough, despite city-made laws to the contrary. But he now felt a sudden prejudice against it because the Coopers were engaged in it. If "them Cooper varmints" were the kind of folks that made 'shine, he wanted nothing to do with distilling. If ever he sunk so low that he was no better than a Cooper——

Further meditation was stopped by the appearance before him of a Cooper varmint.

INTO the blank, darksome doorway came the graceful figure and the sunny head of Jane. With face tilted a little upward and wide eyes lifted toward his rock, she seemed to be looking directly at him. For a second he half expected to see her wave a hand in greeting. But then, as her expression remained unchanged, he realized afresh her inability to see. Too, he noted that her finger-tips rested on the door casing, and that one bare foot was feeling with a slight uncertainty for the edge of the sill.

She paused there, slowly moving her head from side to side as if listening for sounds of bird or beast. Presently she stepped out and, with no further hesitation, moved a few steps to her left, pausing again beside a rose-bush. On that bush several pink blooms were open, but Hard had not previously noticed them. The sightless girl, however, was well aware of their existence. With gentle motions her hands stole over the flowers; then they seemed to seek new buds, touching the stems so lightly that no thorn wounded the exploring fingers. Nor did the bees humming about the bush resent her quest. They buzzed a little more deeply, perhaps, but none turned on her.

At length she walked back to the door stone, carrying with her the largest rose; and, sinking on the step at one side of the door, she lifted the flower to her face. After several deep breaths she let it sink to her breast, where her fingers stroked its velvety petals caressingly. On her lips rested the same little smile with which she had talked to the squirrel in the woods.

Up on the rocks, the man who hated all Coopers swallowed a lump in his throat.

"By mighty, it's a shame!" he growled to himself. "Never to see even the flowers a-growin' into yer own yard—have to feel of 'em to know what they're like—an' live along, all yer life, that way! It's a rotten shame!"

While the thought still was in his mind he witnessed a worse shame.

In the doorway loomed another figure: A frowsy, shambling, heavy-eyed creature which came lurching out as if just awaking from drunken slumber. Apparently it was heading for the creek, perhaps intending to plunge its head into the cold water and disperse the alcoholic fumes still befogging it. Sober, it would have been Jed, next to the youngest of the male Coopers. Now it was only a sodden-faced brute.

Jed did not see the girl resting beside the doorway. But she heard him. As he stepped out, she sprang up. With a startled grunt, he jerked aside; missed his footing, lost balance, toppled off the door stone, and sprawled at full length on the ground.

He arose with a vicious oath, turning a rage-bloated visage to the innocent cause of his mishap. Mouthing invectives, he lunged at her.

"Wha'd'ye mean, ye no-good blind fool ye, a-trippin' me up like that?" he bellowed. "I'll learn ye, ye sneakin' rat!"

"I never, Jed—I never touched ye—ye fell by yer own self!" she cried. "Don't hit me—I didn't— Oh! O-o-h!"

Deliberately, cruelly, he had struck her in the face.

Shrinking back, she turned and tried to find her way in at the door. He seized her hair and yanked her backward.

"I'll learn ye!" he yelled, with another yank that threw her off the step. "Git into my way, will ye! Waller onto the ground yerself, ye squallin' hussy, an' see how ye like it!" He began dragging her mercilessly along, both fists locked in the golden hair.

She did not scream. She only moaned, in helpless terror and pain, striving meanwhile to ease her punishment by crawling toward him on hands and knees. Then suddenly the torment ended. The brutal hands opened and jerked away, and an alarmed oath blended with a loud splash in the creek, followed by fiercely pounding footsteps.

Hard Wood had bounded out of his covert, and now he was leaping at Jed Cooper in a black tempest of wrath. So frightful was his face that for an instant the torturer stood paralyzed. Too late he threw up his fists. Vengeance was upon him.

With no slackening of his pace, Hard launched both fists into the lowering visage fronting him. The blows cracked like cleavers mauling a side of beef. And like a lump of beef Jed thumped on the ground and lay still. Only his hands quivered feebly.

"Ye lousy skunk!" grated Hard, his voice appalling in its concentrated fury. "Ye greasy, swillin' hawg! Ye——"

He gulped and was silent. Jed could not hear his denunciation, and he meant to be heard. Stooping, he grabbed the supine man's ankles; turned, and dragged him to the creek. There he heaved Cooper in bodily.

DURING the second or two before his prisoner began to squirm, he scanned the house for more Coopers. None appeared. Jane had arisen, but was not moving. With one hand pressed to her head, she was recovering from her shock and trying to interpret the sounds from the creek.

"Who—who be ye?" she asked, her voice barely reaching her rescuer.

"Stranger," was the gruff answer.

Then Jed, head down in the creek and half drowned, began to struggle. His captor yanked him back on shore.

For a moment Jed strangled, coughing out water and a couple of broken teeth. Then he tried to get up, one hand involuntarily pawing his smashed nose. Through swelling lids his bloodshot eyes glinted fear and hate.

Before he reached his feet a kick on the shin put him down again. Then into his red mop twisted Hard's strong fingers. He found himself being yanked along the ground by the hair as he had dragged his sister—and learned how much it hurt.

"Ye ain't fitten to live, ye varmint," rumbled his master, "but ye ain't fitten to die neither—not jest yet. If ye was dead ye couldn't feel nothin', an' ye're a-goin' to feel somethin' 'fore I git done with ye! Waller 'round now yerself an' see how ye like it!"

Straight to the girl Jed was forced to crawl, the hands twisting his hair until he whimpered. And then, without relaxing his grip, Hard spoke to Jane.

"Too bad ye can't see him, gal; but he's down onto his hands an' knees an' gittin' his hair pulled, an' a-whinin' 'bout it. Hear him sniffle? An' he's a-goin' to use ye right all the rest o' his mis'rable life. Ain't ye, Jed? Will ye ever lay a hand onto her ag'in?"

Maddened and desperate, Jed found courage to retort.

"I'll do what I want! She's my kin an' she ain't no good—an' I'll git ye, blast ye—I'll fix ye— Ow-oo!"

One hand had left his hair and gone to the back of his neck. And now the steel muscles and iron fingers developed by years of millstone work contracted in a grip of sheer torture. Thumb and fingers sank into him like blunt hooks, rolling his neck-tendons against one another and away from one another in an agony from which he almost fainted. One minute of that was worse than a dozen knockouts. Frenzied efforts to break free only made it more unendurable.

"Will ye leave the gal alone?" demanded the inexorable voice above him.

"Oh, my Gawd—yes! Leggo! Leggo!" screamed Jed.

"Sure ye won't forgit?" Another roll of the thumb.

"No — no! Oh, Gawd — Hard, gimme mercy!"

Jane herself, now pale and shrinking away, added her plea. The anguished tones were more than she could stand.

"Stranger, leave him be! I ain't hurt. Leave him go—please!"

"Awright." The grip relaxed, but did not altogether release its victim. "Now jest keep it into mind, ye cuss, what this feels like. An' next time ye use any woman mean ye may git wuss'n this. Ye will if I see ye; an' I'm liable to see ye any time. Only for her speakin' up for ye I'd give ye some more. Now where's the rest o' yer tribe?"

The last words stuck in his throat. Another figure had appeared in the doorway; a gross, disheveled figure which gaped amazedly at the tableau outside; the barrel-bellied figure of Old Bill Cooper himself, evidently just aroused from a stupor deeper than Jed's. He said no word. He stared, turned, and, with clumsy haste, retreated. But his going was purposeful, and the unarmed spy understood.

With a shove and a kick he sent Jed sprawling to one side.

"G'by, both o' ye," he said, a grim smile quirking his harsh mouth. "Mebbe I'll see ye ag'in when ye don't expect me."

He turned to go.

"Stranger, who be ye?" the girl asked again.

"Name's Hard Wood," he flung over his shoulder. "Yer wust enemy, mebbe. Now hate me good!"

With a short laugh he was speeding away. Through the brook he splashed, and up into the rocky cleft he bounded. Scrambling over a jag of stone, he threw himself down on the farther side of it. As he did so there came a vicious rattle and whine among the rocks, instantly succeeded by the double roar of a gun. He had beaten out Old Bill's shot by a hair's breadth.

Leaping up again, he laughed savagely down at the bloated old miscreant whose red face glowed angrily through a haze of powder-smoke and whose gun still was at his shoulder.

"Go soak yer head, ye ol' ——!" he jeered. "Mebbe if ye got sober once ye could hit somethin'. G'by—till I call ag'in!"

A bellowing curse from Old Bill, another from Jed, an answering sneering laugh, and he was gone; jumping from rock to rock, out of the little cañon, and then rapidly working upward and away in the dense cover.

CHAPTER X

A GUNSHOT AT DUSK

ONCE more Hard swung along the Minnewaska upland; heading toward Peters Kill, keeping his back covered by tree or stone, and glancing occasionally to the rear. Although wary and alert for sounds of possible trailers, he traveled without undue speed or furtiveness, and at times he laughed as he glanced down at reddened knuckles. Old Bill Cooper was too heavy to climb the precipitous declivity in pursuit, Jed was too thoroughly cowed to do so at once, and the other three had not been in sight when the unwelcome visitor departed. So, still aglow with the joy of literally making an enemy crawl, that visitor chuckled as he went.

Before he reached the road, however, his smiles gave way to frowns. Something was gnawing at his mind. It bothered him all the rest of the way to the pine where he had left his gun. When he had withdrawn the weapon from its concealment, he stood once again, thinking. Then he faded into the undergrowth, heading in the general direction of Uncle Eb's home.

Emerging later into a small field across the road from the Wilham place, he strode straight to the house. Uncle Eb, seated on his porch step, was pottering away at the job of tightening up the bottom of a small wash-tub. As his caller crossed the stone wall he looked up.

"Now I wonder," he remarked jestingly, "who's this ga'nt black-headed desperaydo a-comin' at me with a gun an' all. I bet he's the wild man that lives over 'round Dickabar somewheres. What ye want, mister? I ain't got nothin' but some tobacker."

"I'll take some," grinned Hard. "But what I come after was some words. I want to talk to ye 'bout somethin'."

"Good 'nough. Set down. Got yer pipe? Awright, here's yer tobacker." He produced a flat yellow can. "An' I'll give ye all the words I've got on to hand. If they don't suit, mebbe I can git some more after I smoke awhile. Gorry, boy, what ye been a-doin' to yer hand? Looks like sumpthin' bit ye. Ain't been a-puttin' salt onto 'nother bobcat's tail, have ye?"

"Nope." Hard sat down and began filling his pipe. "'Twas a skunk that done this. Is a skunk-bite p'isonous, d'ye s'pose?"

"Depends onto what kind of a skunk 'tis." Eb squinted shrewdly at the cut knuckles. "I used to git them same kind o' marks onto my hands when I was a young feller, 'long o' hittin' skunks into the mouth. Two-legged skunks, they was, without no tail to speak of."

"Same kind of animil," nodded the other. "Name o' Jed Cooper."

Uncle Eb started slightly and eyed him with a keen gaze. Hard lighted a match and puffed at his pipe. Absently the old man did likewise, his eyes straying to the gun. When his tobacco was burning freely he asked—

"Is Jed still a-livin'?"

"I reckon so. Guess mebbe he ain't got as many teeth as he used to have, though."

Eb cackled suddenly. Hard grinned.

"Wal," pondered Uncle Eb, "seein' 'twas that kind of a critter, mebbe 'twouldn't do no harm to wash the place that got bit. Ye can't never tell. Come on in, an' I'll git ye some good strong soap. Then—" with a sidelong glance—"mebbe we'll go talk into the barn, where we can be kind o' private, like. Steve, he ain't here—gone trompin' 'round somewheres into the woods—so we'll have the hull barn to ourselves."

He arose zestfully, eager to hear the laconic story which he felt to be coming, but determined to have the washing attended to first. Hard lounged in after him, nodded to Mis' Wilham, and carelessly laved his hands in order to satisfy the old man. But he was not to escape so easily from friendly offices. Mis' Wilham, spying a long rip down the back of his thin old coat, pounced on him.

"Land's sakes!" she snapped. "What ye been a-doin' to tear up yer clo'es so? Fightin' ag'in, I s'pose. Take that coat right offen yer back, now, an' let me have it. I'll fix it first thing after dinner."

"Oh, nev' mind," he protested. "It's awright."

"Take it off! Ye pore raggedy, if yer mother knowed ye went 'round lookin' so she wouldn't rest easy into her grave. I declare to gracious, ye're a disgrace to her, her that allays kep' things so neat."

Hard took off the coat without another word. And without another word he walked out. Eb, following, cast a frowning glance at his spouse, but said nothing. The young man and the old one trudged silently to the barn, where they sat on a meal-chest and smoked until their pipes expired.

"Wal," vouchsafed Hard then, "I been over to Coopers's, kind o' layin' low an' seein' what was what. Ye know what I went there for; I can't prove it onto 'em yit, but I ain't through. But while I was a-layin' 'round I see this:

"That blind gal o' theirn come out an' set onto the step, an' Jed come out an' she jumped up quick, an' he fell down. 'Twarn't her fault, but he blamed it onto her. An' the cussed varmint hit her into the face an' then drug her 'round by the hair, onto her hands an' knees. It madded me some, an' I went over an' learnt him some manners. But I dunno how long he'll stay learnt, an'——"

"How did ye learn him?" Uncle Eb was not to be robbed of this detail.

"Why, I kind o' knocked him down an' throwed him into the crick an' drug him 'round by the hair an' kicked him a little an' squeezed his neck an' so on, an' I made him crawl onto his knees an' promise the gal he'd leave her 'lone. That's all. But——"

"Haw haw!" exploded Eb. "That's *all!* Oh, my gorry, I wisht Steve was here to listen to this! Jed Cooper a-crawlin' 'round an' gittin' throwed into his own crick—right into his own yard—an' gittin' mauled all up by Hard Wood—ah ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Oh, my gorry!" He slapped his knees and rocked to and fro, his mouth wide open. When he recovered his breath he queried: "But where was the rest o' the tribe! Warn't nobody else 'round?"

"Ol' Bill. He got his gun, an' I went away kind o' spry. I'd left my own gun back a piece into the woods. I dunno where the rest of 'em was, an' I don't care. But now what I've got onto my mind, Uncle Eb, is this: Them varmints ain't fitten to have a gal 'round their place, 'specially a blind one that they use wuss'n a hoss. Course, she's their own kin, but that don't give 'em no right to be p'ison mean to her, seein' she can't help herself. She'd ought to be took care of by somebody decent. Ain't there no way she could be?"

The old man nodded, then shook his head, almost in the same movement. Tapping his dead pipe against the chest, he stared soberly at the farther wall.

"I dunno o' no way at all," he reluctantly admitted. "I agree with ye, her folks ain't fitten to have her. Marthy an' me, we've talked 'bout it more'n once, but I dunno what we can do. I dunno what anybody can do. Ye see, they wouldn't never let her go anywheres else, an' as likely as not she wouldn't go herself, even if she was ast to. An' there can't nobody go into 'nother family an' take a gal outen it when they ain't willin', 'specially that Cooper family. Anybody that tried it wouldn't live long.

"An' besides, I dunno o' no place she could go to. Everybody 'round here has got all the family they can take care of, an' some's got too many. An' besides that, I don't hardly b'lieve she gits used so bad all the time. Ye dunno Joe Cooper, do ye?"

"Only by sight."

"Ye dunno much 'bout him, I mean. Wal, I hear he kind o' stands up for the gal an' don't let nobody pick onto her when he's 'round. I guess he's the best o' the lot 'mongst the boys. That ain't sayin' much, but still I hear he kind o' takes after his mother, though nowheres near as much as the gal does. It's a funny thing 'bout families, the way they run. There's Bad Bill, a reg'lar limb o' the ——, an' wuss than his ol' man. Then there's Joe, pretty rough, but stiddier than the rest of 'em, an' with some heart into his body. An' then comes Jed an' Jerry, both of 'em p'ison mean—wuss than Bad Bill, even. An' then the gal, so dif'rent ye wouldn't know she b'longed to 'em. Leastways that's what I hear.

"Mebbe if she had her eyesight an' could git 'round like other gals she'd go 'way an' find 'nother place for herself, git married or sumpthin', prob'ly; I hear she's awful pretty. But bein' the way she is, she's jest got to stay with her own folks, same as if she was foolish or paralyzed or sumpthin'. It's misfortunate, but I dunno what anybody can do 'bout it."

Hard scowled at the floor. He knew Uncle Eb was stating the blunt truth concerning the girl's hopeless future, but what he had seen that morning rankled in his mind. Still, if she had one defender among her surly brothers, her lot was not quite so bad as it might be. He remembered Joe as a ruggedly-built individual who looked quite capable of holding up his end of any brawl with his relatives.

"Mebbe," the old man added with a quizzical glance, "if ye call 'round there every so often an' lick 'em one or two to a time, they'll git real mannerly to her."

Hard met his sidelong look, and a slow flush mounted to his raven hair. He slid off the chest.

"That ain't what I'm a-goin' there for," he tartly retorted. "Coopers are Coopers, an' no friends o' mine. I'd git jest as mad if I should see a—a blind bird gittin' tormented, as a Cooper gal. Or any other gal."

"O' course," assented Eb, though with a light twinkle under his lashes. "Don't git yer mad up at me, son, or I might pile into ye an' show ye what a real good maulin' feels like. I'm feelin' pretty spry this mornin'. But speakin' serious, Hard, ye'd better go mighty cautious-like from now on, if ye go back to Coopers's. They'll be a-layin' for ye now. I think ye're a fool to go there at all, if ye want to know it. But ye're young an' headstrong, an' ye'll do what ye like, I s'pose. Wal, it's 'most time for dinner. Le's go an' git ready."

THE youth's momentary irritation had died before his senior finished speaking. But his distaste for the undiplomatic remaks of Mis' Wilham remained unabated, and he felt no inclination to listen to more of them at the dinner table. Wherefore he declined the invitation.

"I'll be movin' 'long," he evaded. "See ye some other time."

"Wal, do what ye like. But Marthy ain't fixed yer coat yit, so ye better stay. She won't let go of it till it's sewed up."

"Then I'll leave it till the next time I come 'round. I only wear it 'cause the pockets are so handy."

And leave it he did. First, however, he took from it his matches, powder, and shot. With these in his remaining pockets, and gun once more dangling in one brawny fist, he recrossed the road, leaving the aged couple to discuss him and his ways at their leisure.

On his way back to his cavern home he kept an eye open for Steve, who might perhaps be rambling in this vicinity. But that young man apparently was elsewhere, for no sign of him was evident in this vicinity. Crawling through his hole in the wall, the cave-dweller descended into his outer room by lowering himself to a crude stone platform which he recently had built, and thence stepping down equally crude stairs composed of rock blocks. At their base he paused, surveying for the hundredth time his impregnable fastness; then grinned sardonically southward toward the Cooper clearing. Those foes of his probably were still cursing him and telling one another, with vindictive rage, how they would "git" him. Quite likely they would invade this Clove country in a relentless hunt for his lair. Let 'em come!

Methodically he went about the preparation of his somewhat belated midday meal. After it was eaten he sat for a long time smoking and brooding. When at length he looked up it was in answer to a sound above him, a soft *yarrup* from the throat of a bird.

Perching on a sprig which protruded from the face of the cliff, a yellowhammer was peering down, cocking its head from side to side as it brought one bright eye after the other to bear on him. From time to time it voiced its inquiring note, as if seeking to learn the cause of his reverie. At length, tiring of the silent man's steady regard, it launched itself off the bough, swung about on gently murmuring wings, and drifted away to vanish in the tree tops beyond.

"Ye're nothin' but a bird," soliloquized the watcher. "Ye don't amount to nothin' an' nobody cares whether ye live or die. But ye're a lot better off than some folks. Ye go where ye like an' ye see everything there is, an' nobody abuses ye, an' ye're happy an' free. Why ain't we all like that?"

A moment longer he sat. Then, as if the bird's easy flight had made him restless, he arose and went forth. Outside he warily scanned rock and tree; then worked downward among the blocks and began threading the forest, drifting toward the site of his old home.

When he reached the three maples, the shadows were long and gradually creeping higher on the slopes at the east. As usual, the spot was deserted. He sank again on the old seat, leaning forward, his gun-barrel slanting upward across his chest, his black slouch hat pulled well down. And for another long period he sat thus, the steady eyes under his hatbrim fixedly regarding the half-moon stone.

"Mom," he muttered, "can a Cooper be any good? Ain't a she Cooper 'bout as ornery as a he one?"

As ever, no answer came from the stone. The shadows slipped higher, higher, mounting the farther incline. The cheeping of the crickets increased in volume and deepened in tone, betokening the approach of the dusk. Under the maples the air grew cool. The coatless man twitched his shoulders to throw off a slight chill.

"Wal," he murmured, " 'tain't nothin' to us, is it, mom? Coopers are Coopers, an' we ain't got nothin' to do with 'em—'ceptin' to pay 'em back what we owe 'em, when we can git the proof. That's right. I'll be goin' 'long now. 'Night."

Swiftly he strode away through the woods. By the time he had struggled up among the stones the dusk had deepened until all about him was indistinct. It was only through his familiarity with the spot that he managed to locate his crevice of entrance. There he paused a moment to recover breath before climbing in.

"Coopers are Coopers," he repeated.

As if in answer, a sullen sound from the southward came rolling along the cliff-wall. Distant, but unmistakable and sinister, it struck all creatures hearing it motionless. Birds, beasts, and men, far and near, turned their heads toward the spot whence it had come. It was a gunshot.

The grim noise was not repeated. The listening men and animals of the Traps relaxed. The cave-dweller, who had momentarily held his breath, released it and began climbing up into his rift.

"Somebody killin' a skunk, most likely," he told himself. "Wish 'twas a two-legged one, down Cooper way. But 'twarn't fur enough off."

It did not occur to him that the skunk, instead of being shot at, might have done the shooting.

CHAPTER XI

STEVE TAKES THE WAR-PATH

THUS far the life of Hard Wood had been much like the flowing of the creek which he liked best, the hill-born Peters Kill. There had been periods of peace, during which he drifted easily along, swayed unconsciously by minor events as the stream was turned here and there by the configuration of its bed, but ever moving toward some goal beyond. There had been brawling intervals in which he hurled himself fiercely at ugly things which aroused his wrath, and, having mastered them, passed on with a growl and left them behind. There had been a time of nagging away at hard rock, and other times of aimless wanderings which seemed to get him nowhere. And now, as Peters Kill at one point plunges abruptly over a precipice into a caldron and then swings in a new direction, he came to the day when he was to drop into sudden turmoil and swerve into an undreamed-of channel —with more turbulence ahead of him.

Despite his satisfaction with his rock-bound den, he had no intention of skulking in it while his foes sought him. Carrying the war to the enemy was his habit. So, on the morning after his second visit to the Coopers, he started for the third time into their country.

As before, his primary intention was to spy rather than to attack; to see or hear something which would confirm his suspicion that they were the destroyers of his house. But, if further hostilities should develop, he meant to be prepared for decisive action this time. His gun held extra heavy charges of buckshot, and it would go wherever he went; his trousers pockets, too, bulged with reserve ammunition. There should be no further reconnoitering with hands empty.

This time, too, he purposed to approach by another route and to use different cover. Instead of traveling the roundabout Minnewaska course, he intended to take the more direct, though obviously more hazardous, way of the Coopers' own road; and, if he met no obstacle, to conceal himself in the Cooper corn. That corn grew to within a short distance of the house, and he might by careful movements reach a point whence he could see and hear all that went on. He felt that the place would not be so quiet this morning as yesterday; that more of the "varmints" would be at home, and there might be much loud talk.

The likelihood that some of the clan might be out gunning for him in his own region was not absent from his mind, and he journeyed to the road with every sense alert for lurking danger. But he met no man. At the roadside he paused a few minutes amid the brush, awaiting the passage of a wagon whose axles he heard squeaking a little way off. When it had gone by and he had noted the identity of the driver, one of the numerous Van Hoovens, he crossed the road and took a short-cut to the creek. There again he paused, narrowly scanning the farther shore, then surveying the rocky stream in both directions.

Satisfied, he quietly descended the low, brushy bank and stepped out on a stone. There was no reason to suppose the Coopers to be on watch at this point. If they were in ambush anywhere, their post probably was at the juncture of the path with the road, which was a quarter-mile away at his left.

He had hardly stepped on the first stone, however, when he checked. Darting another glance upstream, he had spied another moving figure. It had emerged from cover at the next bend just as he left his own. It, too, was crossing to the Cooper side. A second later it halted short like himself. A gun swung toward him, but stopped. His own weapon, instinctively lifted, also hung without aim. For an instant the two men stood peering at each other.

Recognition was mutual. The other prowler was Steve Oaks.

Steve jerked his head toward the farther bank and resumed his crossing. Hard also moved forward, inwardly grumbling. Steve was altogether too fond of snooping around here just when Hard had business with the Coopers. Why couldn't he keep himself somewhere else and mind his own affairs?

Steve climbed the bank and disappeared. Hard knew he would be waiting, though, and he swung on determinedly. Nobody should turn him back now.

He soon learned, however, that Steve had no intention of playing the rôle of peacemaker. He found him waiting beside the path, half hidden by the thickly needled branches of a low pine, his gun forward and his eyes glittering icily under his low-drawn hat brim.

"What ye doin' here?" demanded Steve, low-voiced.

"Pickin' posies," sarcastically. "What 'bout you?"

"Killin' snakes!"

Behind those two words was a concentrated ferocity which startled Hard. The voice, though hardly more than a whisper, was virulent as the hiss of a serpent. The face was not that of the drawling, philosophic Steve whom he had always known.

It was that of a snarling wolf, baring its teeth for the kill.

For an astounded moment Hard stared dumbly into that deadly visage. Then, recovering himself, he responded:

"So'm I, mebbe. But what d'ye mean?"

"Heard 'bout Uncle Eb?"

Again Hard stood voiceless. And, as he probed the face under the pine, he chilled.

"No," he jerked, with an effort. "What—what 'bout him?"

"Jed Cooper shot him las' night."

Hard staggered. Uncle Eb shot by Jed Cooper! Uncle Eb, universally liked—not even the Coopers had been enemies of his. It was unbelievable. Yet, echoing in his mind, sounded again the distant gunshot he had heard at dusk.

"Good God!" gasped Hard. "Dead?"

"'Tain't Jed's fault he ain't! He done his——"

"He ain't dead?" the other broke in. "He ain't— Is he a-dyin'?"

"Nope. Shot went low an' hit his legs. But——"

Hard gave a gusty sigh of relief. Only shot in the legs! That wasn't much, though of course Uncle Eb was old, and old folks sometimes died from injuries not very serious. Then sudden rage flared red in his soul. The dirty, low-down varmints! Every last one of 'em ought to be wiped out. They'd get all the shooting they wanted now!

Steve, in that low, repressed tone, was talking. He forced himself to listen.

"'LONG 'bout dark, 'twas, an' Uncle Eb he took the notion to go down an' see Davy McCafferty 'bout somethin'. He'd got a little ways down the road, an' he thought he heard somethin' a-movin' toward him into the brush, but he didn't stop; kep' right on a-goin'. Nex' thing he knowed, the buckshot hit him an' he heard the gun. He tumbled right down, o' course, but he turned over an' looked back. An' 'bout a couple o' rods back, Jed Cooper jumped outen the brush an' stood an' looked at him. Uncle Eb see him plain.

"Uncle Eb, he hollered to him an' ast him what he meant a-waylayin' him like that. An' Jed he made a kind of a funny noise into his throat, an' he jumped back in the brush, an' he was gone.

"Andy Mack, he was a-comin' up the road a little piece beyend there, jest 'round the turn, an' o' course he heard the shootin' an' Uncle Eb a-hollerin', an' he come a-runnin'. He's strong as an ox, ye know, an' he picked up Uncle Eb like he was a baby, an' put for the house. They stopped the bleedin', but they couldn't git the shots out—there was five of 'em, 'way in deep. So Andy went home an' harnessed up an' drove clear to High Falls for the doctor. Doctor took out all the balls, an' he says Uncle Eb'll be awright after awhile. But that ain't a-goin' to do Jed no good!"

The last words came with a click of teeth, and Steve turned a malevolent gaze along the Cooper path. Hard nodded grimly. But he scowled in a perplexed way.

"But I don't see no sense into it, Steve," he puzzled. "Why would Jed shoot him? An' why would he shoot so low? Coopers don't shoot to hit legs!"

"Ye bet they don't. That must of jest been Uncle Eb's good luck. Mebbe Jed's foot slipped or somethin', or a bug bothered him. I mind one time I shot at a bird, an' jest as I let go a bug flew in my eye, an' it started me so I missed the bird by three foot. Must of been somethin' like that that throwed Jed's gun down. Jed was a-shootin' for the back. An' I reckon the reason why he shot at Uncle Eb's back, Hard, was 'cause your coat was onto it. But that ain't no excuse."

"My coat?" repeated Hard, blankly. "Ye mean Uncle Eb was wearin'——"

"Your coat. Seems ye left it to the house yest'day, an' Aunt Marthy she sewed up a hole into it. An' when Uncle Eb started down the road 'twas gittin' a little cool, an' yer coat was handy, an' he slipped it on. It's kind of a yellerish coat, ye know, an' there ain't 'nother one like it into the Traps. An' Uncle Eb's hat is same as yourn, kind o' black an' floppy, an' he had it onto the back of his head, a-coverin' up his white hair. An' the Cooperses prob'ly dunno ye've gone a-livin' by yerself over to Dickabar—we ain't said nothin'.

"So I figger Jed was a-workin' toward the house to see if he could git ye—through a winder, mebbe—'long o' yer lickin' him yest'day. An' he see this coat through the brush, or hearn Uncle Eb a-walkin', an' he come through; an' the light was kind o' bad, an' like as not he had some licker into him, an' he took Uncle Eb's back for yourn. So he shot quick. An' then when he see who 'twas, he run."

"The sneakin' snake!" Hard's voice shook with rage. He saw it all now, and knew well that the shot from the brush had been fired in deliberate assassination. The fact that it had struck down Uncle Eb made the crime far more heinous than if it had hit Hard himself.

"I warn't to home las' night," Steve concluded, "or I'd of got goin' 'fore now. I slep' out into the woods, an' didn't know nothin' 'bout this till jes' now. Uncle Eb, he says, 'Ye go find Hard if ye kin, Steve, an' tell him to look out, 'cause they're after him. Don't ye worry 'bout me. I'm awright.' Says I, 'Awright,' an' I got started. But I didn't waste no time lookin' for ye, o' course. I've got business over here fust. An' now I'm a-goin' to 'tend to it. Keep back till I git done."

He moved to step around the pine. Hard halted him.

"Keep back?" he blazed. "Me? Who d'ye think ye're talkin' to? Keep back yerself! I'm a-fixin' this thing!"

Steve wheeled on him. His voice came chill, metallic, unhuman.

"Shet up! Keep out! I'm short o' temper this mornin'. I'm a-killin' Jed Cooper. Any man that comes 'tween me an' him gits hurt. Hurt bad. I'm a-warnin' ye."

Hard Wood, hard as he was when aroused, nearly gave ground. He knew now why men stepped wide of this vengeful killer. For the first time in his life he felt the numbing clutch of Fear close around his heart; fear, not of man, not of death, but of something in those basilisk eyes; something appalling, abysmal as some horrible monster lurking in the uttermost depths of a sunless sea; a cold-blooded, clammy thing which knew no emotion, no instinct save the will to slay.

Yet, after a frozen instant, he mastered himself and combated the lethal will opposing his own.

"An' I'm a-warnin' ye back," he growled. "Ye've been a-meddlin' into my business too much, an' ye can't do it no more. Ye've been a-tryin' to hold me offen them varmints when I had a lot more ag'in 'em than ye've got now—an' now ye think ye can steal my own fight right out o' my teeth, do ye? Jed Cooper's mine, an' I'm a-goin' to git him! 'Twas me he was a-shootin' at last night when he hit Uncle Eb, an' it's me he'll settle with now!"

With that he stepped out into the path, his gaze still locked with that of his erstwhile friend. Steve stood a second, his jaw-muscles bulging with the strain of hard-set teeth, his cavernous eyes seeming to glow green with fury. Then, with a choking curse, he sprang out and confronted Hard at close quarters.

"Ye fool!" His breath whistled through his teeth. "Ye——"

Sudden as a lightning-flash came an interruption. A few feet away sounded two clicks and an incisive voice.

"Drop those guns! Hands up!"

CHAPTER XII

STRANGE ALLIES

IN THE path stood three men. They had come from the direction of the road, walking so quietly that the pair talking under the pine had not sensed their approach. Now two of them, standing with rifles leveled at the hip, were covering the young hillmen who had so suddenly emerged from the brush. The third, unarmed, stood with hands dangling before him.

At the impact of that voice and the menacing gun-clicks Hard and Steve had whirled, instinctively swinging their own weapons toward the danger. Now, however, they stood bewildered, staring at the newcomers. They were not Coopers. At least, the riflemen were not; they were strangers, steel-eyed, grim-jawed, city-garbed except for broad belts bristling with cartridges. The unarmed man was Joe Cooper, the one who habitually defended his blind sister.

On Joe's face now was a heavy, hopeless expression. And on the thick wrists which hung so uselessly in front of him glinted steel manacles.

After the first shock of surprize, the truth became evident to the puzzled pair. Joe was under arrest; the other two were officers; and all three were on their way to the Cooper place.

"Drop 'em!" came a second sharp command.

The speaker, a tall, lean fellow with hawk features and chill gray eyes, lifted his rifle a little higher, its muzzle centering on Steve's chest. His mate, shorter and stockier but none the less bleak of countenance, also raised his gun, which grinned coldly at Hard's head.

"I ain't a-droppin' my gun for nobody," rasped Steve. "S'posin' ye drop yer own an' tell us what ye're a-tryin' to do."

There was a silence. The outsiders searched the faces fronting them. The avengers of Uncle Eb scowled belligerently back, their half-raised guns gripped in ready fists, their thumbs on the hammers.

"Pretty fresh, ain't you!" jarred the tall one. "What's your name?"

"Oaks. What's yourn?"

Another second of probing. Then the inquisitor flung a question at Hard.

"Who are you?"

"Name's Wood, if it's any o' your business."

The thin mouth of the interrogator narrowed a trifle more at the truculent retort. But his next words were directed, not to the antagonistic couple, but to his prisoner. Without moving his watchful gaze, he demanded—

"That right, Cooper?"

The manacled man grunted a sullen assent.

"They in with your crowd?"

"Naw," mumbled Joe.

The riflemen relaxed a bit. Their guns slowly sank, though the muzzles still pointed forward.

"All right—" the tall man began, when Steve broke in.

"We ain't into your tribe yit, Joe no. But we're a-goin' to git into 'em soon's we git into gunshot of 'em! Good thing for ye ye're tied up tight, or ye might git the same dose."

"Wha'd'ye mean?" snarled Joe.

"That cussed skunk of a brother o' yourn, Jed, shot Uncle Eb las' night. That's what I mean. An' I ain't partic'lar what Cooper I shoot at this mornin'."

Joe stared. The officers exchanged glances.

'It's a lie!" Joe disputed. "Jed never 'd shoot Uncle Eb! 'Less'n, mebbe, he was awful drunk an' didn't know what he was a-doin'. Ain't none of us got nothin' ag'in Uncle Eb."

"Uncle Eb see him plain," retorted Steve. "Nev' mind why Jed done it. Ye're a-goin' to lose one o' yer family right quick, mebbe more'n one. The three o' ye better stay right here awhile."

Joe glowered, licked his lips, but seemed to find no answer. The shorter of the officers, who hitherto had not made a sound, chuckled softly.

"Looks as if we'd tumbled into somethin' good, Rob," he commented. "These billies might help us some. What d'yuh think?"

Rob considered. Hard Wood forestalled his answer.

"We ain't helpin' nobody but ourselves. We're a-mindin' our own business—you 'tend to yourn. We got here ahead o' ye an' we're doin' our business first. But 'fore we go, Joe, I want to ask ye one question. I ain't had a chance to ask it from any Cooper 'fore now. Wha'd ye burn my house for?"

The tone of that question made it a savage accusation. Joe licked his lips again.

"I never burnt yer house," he denied.

"Mebbe *you* didn't. But who o' yer tribe done it?"

Joe's gaze wavered.

"I dunno nothin' 'bout yer rotten ol' house," he mumbled.

But his denial was half-hearted and unconvincing. Again the officers exchanged glances.

"Ye're a liar. Steve, come on. Le's git to goin'."

As one man, the pair who so recently had been riven apart by anger turned to go. With the arrival of those outsiders they had instinctively united; and now, their fierce disagreement totally forgotten, they moved unitedly to complete their grim mission before these meddling strangers could upset their plan. But the strangers meddled again immediately.

"Hey, you! Halt there!"

THE sharp voice of the tall Rob penetrated like a knife edge; and, involuntarily, the hillmen obeyed. Rob's rifle again covered them, and over its barrel Rob gave them their orders.

"You'll go the other way," he clipped. "We're handlin' the Coopers ourselves. You git out o' here or we'll put yuh under arrest. G'wan!"

"Shut up yer bellerin'!" fiercely countered Hard. "Want to tell everybody ye're a-comin'? An' ye ain't got nothin' to arrest us for—not till we've done somethin'. An' ye'll have a healthy time a-doin' it then! An' ye dasn't shoot that gun o' yourn now, ye fool, for two good reasons: Ye can't shoot us into the back when we ain't committed no crime, an' ye don't want Coopers to hear ye shoot. Put that into yer pipe an' smoke it. Come on, Steve."

Steve came, but slowly and warily, half turned toward the menacing Rob. He was not so sure about what those officers might do; he had bitter memories of penitentiary ways and deep-rooted distrust of all hounds of the law. Nor was Hard, for all his external assurance, unaware of the fact that the situation was decidedly precarious. Those rifles *might* strike them down, and Cooper guns might riddle them from the other direction; there was no knowing what lay just around the next bend.

The shorter officer chuckled again, and again he spoke.

"Go slow, Rob. They've got us stumped. We didn't come here to fight these fellers. Hey, wait a minute, you two, and let's talk sensible. 'Twon't hurt yuh any, and it might help all around. Just wait where y' are."

He dropped his muzzle carelessly toward the ground, nudged Joe, and walked confidently toward them. Rob also came on, though with a less amiable expression.

"Ye can stop 'bout six foot away," warned Steve. "We ain't deef, an' ye needn't git no nigher to us."

"Oh, all right. Pretty suspicious, ain't yuh, for a couple of honest boys that ain't doin' anything except kill a man or so? Huh-huh!" Again the chuckle. "But we'll make it six foot if yuh like. S'posin' we step off the path a little, where we'll be more out o' sight. Rob, keep an eye skinned while we're talkin', so nobody will come along and give us a surprize party. Here's a good place. Come on, boys, we'll chew it over right here."

He stepped aside into a little natural gap, shouldering Joe in ahead of him. Hard and Steve, approaching suspiciously, stopped facing him. Rob, a little behind his mate and the prisoner, took his stand at the edge of the brush, where he could see and hear all while watching the path.

"Well, boys," resumed the stocky man, his face now good-humored but his tone crisp, "let's understand each other. First, this pal o' mine is Roberts, and I'm Parker. We've got some business with these Coopers that's more important than yours. Ours is for the government, and yours is only personal; and what's more, if the Cooper crowd has been shootin' and burnin' like yuh say they have, the law'll make 'em sweat for it better'n you can. See? Better let the law handle 'em, boys, and stay on the right side o' the law yourselves. It pays.

"Yuh were talkin' about killin' a feller, now. But d'yuh bear in mind that when yuh kill a man he's dead and out of it after that? But if yuh let him live and spend a few years in prison, he's payin' yuh a long time for what he did. A prison ain't a pleasure resort. Did yuh ever think about that, Oaks?"

His face suddenly hardened into a stern mask. Steve made a hoarse sound and stepped back a pace.

"Your first name's Steve, maybe?" Parker pursued relentlessly.

"Mebbe," jerked Steve. "What 'bout it?"

"Oh, nothin'. Only maybe I've heard about a Steve Oaks, and I know he stands all right with the law right now, but maybe he knows how it feels to be cooped up. 'Tain't so funny, is it? You bet! Well, then, if yuh've got somethin' against a feller, yuh're gittin' back at him a good deal harder by puttin' him into a lot o' trouble than by puttin' him out of all his troubles, ain't yuh?"

"Git right down to business!" interrupted Hard. "What ye here for? Who d'ye want? What's Joe done?"

He felt that he already knew the answer to his questions, but he wished to make sure. The reply was virtually what he expected.

"Well, we're makin' a clean sweep. It's been a long time comin', but we've got the goods now, thanks to Joe here." Joe winced. "We want old William Cooper, and young William Cooper, *alias* Bad Bill—he's been wanted quite a while—and Jed and Jerry Cooper, besides our friend Joe. And we want to destroy their still."

THERE was a silence. Hard and Steve eyed Joe, who looked miserably down at his handcuffs. When Hard spoke his voice was stony.

"Ye're revenoo men. Wal, I want to tell ye, these Coopers are my wust enemies, but I'd never lift a hand to help revenoo men git a feller for 'stillin'. Law or no law, a feller's got as good a right to make his own licker as to make his own coffee. An' I——"

"Now wait a minute, Wood, wait a minute. Yuh're gittin' off on the wrong foot.

Makin' your own, and sellin' it against the law, are two different things. It's all right to sell it, too, if yuh meet the requirements of the government. What the government is after is these fellers that peddle this wildcat stuff—rotgut—that ain't manufactured right in the first place and is smuggled in the second place and poisons men so they commit murders and all kinds o' crimes in the last place. If you fellers want to make that stuff and drink it yourselves, all right—we don't care; it's your own funeral. But yuh've got no right to feed poison to other men, and yuh've got no more right to rob the government of the legal revenues than yuh have to rob a man of his legal property.

"Well, that's what this crowd's been doin'. They've been at it a long time. They've been bringin' it down hid in wagonloads o' charcoal. The charcoal was a blind. It was only to cover up kegs o' moonshine. They've sold it to some shady saloons, and the saloons doctored it up and sold it over the bar. There's no knowin' how many murders have been committed and how many women and children have suffered on account o' men drinkin' this Cooper stuff when they'd paid for honest drinks. It's been covered up so neat that it's taken us a mighty long time to trace it back to the source, but we've located the spring now, and it's goin' dry.

"We caught young Joe, here, with the goods, down below, and we finally persuaded him to cough up the whole works. We brought him back to show us the way, and we're goin' to give the old man and the rest o' the boys a ride, and yuh won't see 'em again for quite a while.

"Now yuh know the whole story, and yuh can do one of two things. Yuh're a couple o' spunky lads, and we can maybe use yuh. So if yuh want, yuh can help us to round up the gang. Or if that don't suit, yuh can go back and leave us. Yuh can't stop us or beat us to it. If yuh try it yuh'll be interferin' with officers of the law in the performance o' their duty, and that'll give us a right to shoot yuh with no more warnin'. I'm tellin' yuh all this so yuh'll know just where yuh stand. Now it's up to you."

As his rapid talk ceased, the spot seemed very still. Low-toned though his words had been, they had come with the purring strength of mighty machinery running under smooth restraint; and now it was as if the driving energy had been momentarily suspended, letting empty silence rule for a brief interval. In that pause there came to the listening hillmen a formless feeling that they faced a vast, inexorable power before which they were as pigmies; that Roberts and Parker, too, were merely small visible symbols of that power—but that behind them pressed a stupendous force which could utterly obliterate any man or men who dared defy it.

To Steve, who once had endured the soul-strangling grip of the steel and stone of prison cell and wall, that power was more real and awful than to the unconfined Hard Wood. But stronger even than the dread vision of that man-crushing "pen" was the implacable demon within him which would be sated only by revenge. Mighty though law and government might be, this thing was mightier. Stonily he still refused to swerve from his fixed purpose.

"Speakin' for myself," he asserted, "I don't do neither o' them things. I don't turn back an' I don't help ye. Nor I don't hender ye. I'm a-doin' what I come here to do. Ye can do the same."

"An' speakin' for myself," echoed Hard, "I say the same. But I don't see no need for you an' us to fall foul of each other. From what ye tell, ye want to arrest all the Coopers for 'stillin'. One more or less don't make no difference to ye, long's they're all cleaned up. An' Jed Cooper b'longs to me! Ye can have the rest of 'em, the hull kit an' b'ilin', for all I care—if ye can git 'em. They ain't a-goin' to git down on to their knees to ye. But ye keep it into mind that Jed Cooper's mine!"

The hawk-faced Roberts moved impatiently and voiced a sneer.

"Talk, talk, talk! Look here, feller, all Coopers look alike to us, see? Yuh can have your Jed Cooper after the law gits through with him, and not before. We're goin' to clean up and take 'em all. That's all there is to it. Come on, Park, cut out the argument and let's move."

Parker scowled, both at the recalcitrant youths and at his uncompromising partner. But he spoke again—and, in speaking, cut the Gordian knot.

"Yuh're a couple o' fools, and I'm another to argue with yuh!" he growled. "But, say, listen. We're all countin' our chickens before they hatch. We've got to git our Coopers first. Now if there's any fightin' —*if*, mind yuh—and if that pet o' yours, the one yuh call Jed, gits shot while resistin' arrest, I don't know as we'll cry much about it. But if they surrender peaceable, we'll talk about it later on. First thing to do is to round 'em up."

"Now yuh're talkin' sense," approved Roberts.

Steve suddenly nodded assent. Then he looked down at his gun to mask a sinister gleam in his eyes. *If* there should be fighting. Did these fools actually think to round up the Coopers without a fight?

Hard Wood, with the same thought in mind, bit back a sudden impulse to grin. Parker, after all his talk, had unwittingly, or so it seemed, surrendered.

"Suits me, mister," he said.

With a sidelong glance at Steve, he stepped again into the path.

Steve turned with him. The pair swung along, watching the brush and trees lining the narrow way, their weapons ready. Behind them, Parker grinned at Roberts, who still scowled.

"Got 'em with us," he muttered. "We're liable to need 'em."

"Watch 'em," grumbled Roberts. "I don't trust 'em."

"They're all right," asserted Parker. Then, to Cooper: "Come on, you! No hangin' back!"

Joe, after a desperate look around, sullenly obeyed. With the officers a pace behind him, he slouched along toward the father and brothers whom he had betrayed by his confession down in the valley—a confession which, no doubt, had been wrung from him only by "third degree" methods, but which now hung heavier and blacker in his mind at every step nearer home.

Hard halted.

"Want to tell ye," he warned, "there's a gal over here. She's blind. Be mighty sure ye don't make no mistake an' hurt her."

In his voice was an unmistakable threat of dire consequences in case of any such mistake. Parker nodded, his expression unchanging. Joe's florid visage reddened further with sudden rage.

"Yup!" he rumbled. "If ye hurt Jane I'll kill the both o' ye, if it takes me a hundred year!"

"Shut up!" snapped Roberts, shoving him onward.

Hard lengthened his stride to catch up with Steve. Nobody spoke again. Gliding along the grassy track with no sound save the almost inaudible tread of feet, the queerly allied band moved forward, intent on what waited beyond.

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROOF

AT THE edge of the Cooper clearing, the hunters of the Coopers paused by tacit consent to estimate the situation.

Nobody had intercepted them. Nobody was on watch even here, at the end of the woods. And nobody was in sight beyond. The absence of human life, the stillness brooding over the place, were ominous.

The lower part of the squatty house was not visible from this point, being screened from view by intervening corn. Only the blank, dingy roofs of house and barn, broadside on, were to be seen above the maize tops. But a part of the yard next to the dwelling lay open to the eye, and it was empty. Not even a hen moved there.

"Skipped!" growled Roberts. "Likely as not they had a spy out, and all this fool talk o' yours back yonder, Park, gave 'em time to take to the woods."

"Nope," contradicted Steve, positively. "They're there. I feel 'em."

"Huh! Wha'd'yuh mean, feel 'em?" sneered Roberts.

"If ye lived into the woods most o' the time, like I do, ye'd know," retorted the rover, contemptuously. "Take you city fellers offen yer streets an' ye dunno nothin'. I *feel* them varmints over yender. An' I know why they're a-layin' quiet. They're expectin' me to come an' settle with 'em for Uncle Eb. They know me an' they know what I'll do."

"Layin' in the corn, I bet," guessed Parker, eyeing the dense green.

"Naw," disputed Steve. "Corn ain't no cover. The second ye move the corn moves with ye an' gives ye away. An' they dunno which way I'm a-comin' from. I'm liable to hit 'em from any d'rection. So they're right 'round the house, prob'ly into it, a-waitin' for me to come into sight."

Both of the sleuths studied him a moment, then nodded acceptance of his logic. Roberts gave his belt a hitch. Parker reached back to his right hip pocket and loosened something which bulged his coat a trifle. Joe, the somber flame of desperation deepening in his eyes, set his teeth harder. Then spoke Hard Wood.

"I'll be leavin' ye. You fellers ain't goin' to git 'em without fightin'. It'll pay ye to wait 'bout ten minutes till I git into the place I've got into mind."

"Where's that?" demanded Steve.

"Up into the rocks front o' the house. Somebody else had better git 'round back o' the place. That'll cover both doors, front an' back. By rights, the other two o' ye ought to git onto each side so's to cover the winders. But do what ye like. I'm a-goin'."

Roberts turned on him with eyes narrowed to slits.

"Look here, feller!" he warned. "Don't try double-crossin' us after yuh git away! This rifle o' mine will shoot a lot faster than your gun and carry a lot farther, and I know how to use it. See?"

Hard flicked a glance down at the big-bored Winchester and started a hot retort. But Parker interposed.

"Shut up, Rob!" he clipped. "Don't be a fool. Git goin', Wood. We'll wait just ten minutes for yuh—unless somethin' starts before then. Hustle up!"

With a final glare at Roberts, the hillman wheeled and strode away, masked by the corn, toward the Minnewaska slope. Steve, watching him, smiled dourly.

"Good 'nough," he commented. "'Less'n I'm foolish into the head, Jed's a-goin' to come a-sneakin' outen the back door when he knows there's a gun a-layin' for him in front. I'm takin' that back door."

He turned in the opposite direction, vanishing into the brush. Parker, with another keen glance toward the apparently lifeless house, drew out a watch.

"Ten minutes for the two of 'em," he said. "Let's git back a couple o' steps and wait."

Muttering something, Roberts acceded. They backed into a bit of shade and stood there, the tiny ticking of the watch and the occasional chirp of a grasshopper alone breaking the sinister quietude of the place.

On the eastern edge of the clearing, Steve drifted with uncanny skill through the brush fringe, the leaves and branches betraying no sign of his progress. On the western side, Hard leaped across the little creek and was gone among the trees and rocks. Less cunningly than the wolfish Oaks, but quietly enough, he stole along until he saw looming ahead the great split boulder whose gap commanded the front of the house.

Crouching lower and moving more cautiously, he crept around the curving side of the stone, ready for instant action against any one who might already be ambushed there. As he reached the rear of the opening he moved by inches, scanning every bump of rock in the cleft. No man lay there. He slipped in, hugging the left inner side, which slanted a bit to the right before him. A minute later he peered out and down at the house.

The place was not deserted.

The scene was strikingly similar to the one last photographed on his mind at this spot. Two of the three Coopers who had been there when he left were there again this morning: Old Bill Cooper and Jane. Old Bill was in the exact spot where Hard had left him yesterday—in the open doorway; but now he was seated in a chair, his heavy body slouched forward, his puffy eyes seemingly dwelling on nothing in particular.

Jane was standing on the door stone, her head turned toward her father, who was rumbling some remark which the listener could not catch. But Jed, who yesterday had been rising from the ground to bawl a curse through the powder-smoke; Jed, who, above all, was most wanted now, had disappeared. He was not in the yard, nor in the doorway, nor at a window. If he was here at all, he was under cover.

Hard's eyes roved swiftly back and forth, seeking him. Then they centered again on the pair at the door. His mouth opened for a yell—and froze in that position. His breath stopped. His gun almost slid from his grasp. For a moment he stood thus. Then a red wave shot to his hair, and his loose jaw snapped shut like a steel trap.

Jane Cooper was wearing his mother's dress.

There could be no doubt of it. It was that flowery dress which had been the last work of the woman who now lay under the half-moon stone. Its colors, its flowers, were stamped indelibly on Hard's mind. Had he not admired it when she was making it? Had he not stared with grief-stricken gaze at it after she died? Moreover, there was no possibility that the Coopers could have bought material from the same piece of goods. The peddler who sold it to Mis' Wood had possessed no more of it, and he had been coming from the north, not the south, when he reached the Wood home; also, no peddler was allowed on Cooper grounds. Finally, the fit of the drest showed even to a masculine eye that is never had been made for its present wearer. It hung baggily on her slender figure: a garment made for a mature woman, put on a slim-hipped girl.

And Jane Cooper, whom Hard had twice recklessly rescued, who owed to him her very life, now flaunted in his face a dress stolen from his mother. And the presence of that garment here explained conclusively the absence of the bronze chest-metal from the débris of his home; it explained also the destruction of that home. This Cooper tribe had not only burned that house, but looted it first. They had carried away the chest with them. They had robbed his dead. They were ghouls.

All the sympathy, all the pity he had felt for that girl was now obliterated from his soul as by a searing flash of flame. Grave-robber, daughter and sister of thieves and worse than thieves! In the same instant vanished the slight hesitation, inculcated by Uncle Eb, which had hitherto restrained him from shooting at Cooper varmints. But for the fact that a female of the Cooper species was in the way, he would have shot Old Bill then and there. As it was, he furiously swung his gun half-way up; then checked the movement and again opened his lips to yell. Before, he had meant to demand that Jed be sent out. Now, he would roar to Old Bill to yank that brat aside and stand up like a man.

But, before he could voice the order, Old Bill anticipated it. His apparently sleepy eyes had caught the movement of that gun among the rocks. With astonishing speed for so heavy a man, he started up, snatching his own gun from some spot beside him. And then blind Jane got in the way.

Unaware of what was imminent, she moved a little nearer to her father. The movement blocked his rising gun. Too, it made impossible a shot from the vengeful Hard. Rumbling a throaty oath, Old Bill darted a thick hand at her shoulder and made to drag her into the house. But the hand stopped as if paralyzed.

Shrill, piercing, keen as a razor-edge, a whistle cut the air. It came from the spot where the officers waited. Once more it sounded—and was cut short as if by a blow.

BACK at the path, Parker had put away his watch and nodded. At that final moment Joe Cooper had made his last desperate effort to be true to his clan. Lifting his shackled hands and pressing fingers to teeth, he had sent that danger-call screeching across the corn. So quick and unexpected had been his action that he sounded the warning twice before the officers flung themselves on him. Then he was handled with merciless efficiency.

For a second Old Bill stood as if rooted to the floor, his gaze riveted on the now fully revealed figure in the rock-rift, but his mind on that whistle. He knew every one of his sons was—except Joe: Joe, who had gone out with a load of 'shine two days ago and had unaccountably failed to return. And, knowing where the rest of his boys were, he knew this warning could come only from Joe. He knew, too, that it portended something more serious than the presence of the one man whom he could see: Hard Wood. Wherefore——

Instead of shoving the girl behind him, he backed and drew her in before him, shielding himself from Hard. He made her find and shut the door and bolt it. And Hard, grinding his teeth, stood impotent. To shoot into that door would be worse than useless. Old Bill would not be standing behind it now. The only one likely to be hit was Jane.

Then, behind a dirty window at one side of the door, a face showed vaguely, peering upward. Whose it was, Hard could not discern, but it certainly was not that of the girl. A blind girl obviously would not be peering from a window, anyway. With a savage hiss, he leveled his gun and fired—both barrels.

Even as he drew the triggers, the face slid aside, and he knew he had missed. But the kick of his weapon, the crash of its double discharge, the smash of the window, were satisfaction in themselves. He had thrown off all restraint. He had shot into the lair of his enemies. He had fired the first gun of a battle which now would not end until he or they were shattered.

Never before had Hard Wood shot at a man. He never had needed to; his sledge-hammer fists had been fearful enough. But now that he had done so, fierce exultation flooded his soul. The explosion of that powder had been also the explosion of the wrath consuming him, and it had blown away a hot mist which seemed to have come before his eyes. Now he felt curiously cool and clear-sighted, albeit recklessly exhilarated. Poising among the rocks he laughed, a roaring, reverberating laugh which echoed out in the wake of his gunshot. Then, drawing his ramrod, he danced lightly back into better cover to reload.

In the bare nick of time he glanced behind him. Out through the shattered window was darting a gun-barrel, and behind it flamed the red face and coppery hair of his initial enemy—Copperhead. Quick as light, Hard dodged down behind a rock block. The little cañon bellowed with the shock of Copperhead's return fire. Buckshot sizzled, spatted, screamed around and above. Hard's hat flew violently from his head, carrying with it a long black lock of hair. Straightening up, he laughed again.

"Copperhead! Yah, Copperhead!" he taunted. "This time I'll git ye—an' yer hull —— tribe with ye!"

Copperhead replied with a torrent of obscenity. He was a bigger, heavier, more brutal-looking Copperhead now than on that long ago day when he had earned his name, and both his hatred and his tongue were, if anything, more virulent than ever. At his foul invective Hard's grin left his face and his jaw clamped into its usual grim set. Stepping down another yard into invulnerable cover, he fell to work with powder, wads, shot, rod, and caps.

The charges he rammed home were even heavier than before. As he was completing his rapid work, he cocked an ear toward the clearing. There had been no more firing, and now a sharp voice was shouting authoritatively.

"William Cooper! You and all your sons! Walk out here and surrender to the United States Government!"

Dead silence. Hard swiftly slid the rod down its groove, adjusted the caps, and ascended his bulwark. At the front of the house nobody was in sight. Stepping to the right wall of his rift, he peered out to the left.

Near the corn, and also near the side of the house, stood Roberts and Parker and Joe. Clutching their prisoner firmly by either arm and holding him slightly ahead of them, they were facing windows behind which they evidently saw some one. Joe slouched more than ever, thoroughly beaten; indeed, he was half stunned from the manhandling he had just received. It was the snappish, morose Roberts who was doing the talking.

"Don't make any resistance!" he commanded. "If yuh do yuh haven't got a chance. We've got yuh surrounded. Your game's up. Walk out here with your hands empty! Lively!"

Another silence. The position of the officers protected them. No buckshot could be fired at them without hitting Joe, as they well knew. But there was no sign that the Coopers were obeying.

Then, slowly, came the voice of Old Bill. Evidently he had appeared at an open window. His tone and his words astonished the listening Hard.

"What say, mister? I'm a little hard o' hearin'," he whined. "Can't hear ye. What ye a-doin' to my boy? Leave him be!"

It was a weak, quavering voice, hardly recognizable as that of the bull-necked Old Bill. And Old Bill was no more deaf than was Roberts.

"Come—out—here!" bellowed the tall sleuth. "Yuh're — under — arrest! Hear that?"

Another brief pause, as if Cooper were trying to understand. Then, in the same whining voice:

"Can't ye speak a little louder, mister? I don't quite understand ye."

The old reprobate was leaning out a little now, one hand cupped behind an ear, the other grasping the sill; both obviously empty. Hard could not see this; but, impelled by hatred, he shouted—

"He's lyin'! He can hear——"

His warning was drowned by a sudden blunt bang, not the roar of a shotgun, but the report of a single-shot rifle. It did its work. Roberts, impatient, exasperated, and contemptuous of the stupid old fool, had involuntarily stepped a little nearer. It was only one step, but his legs were long, and it moved him clear of Joe. Instantly the bullet, fired by some one concealed behind the old man, sped on its way.

Roberts staggered. Automatically his rifle lifted and spat one shot in return. His lever-hand jerked down—and stayed down. For an instant he stood braced, motionless as a statue, his gun open. Then, still rigid, he pitched forward and lay lifeless.

Old Bill Cooper slumped on his window sill and hung there, humped over like a great toad. He had not had time to throw his gross body back before the retaliating bullet caught him. He had not lived long enough even to grin over the success of his trick. Roberts, dead on his feet, but fighting with the last reflex action of his muscles, had shot him through the head.

CHAPTER XIV

BULLET AND BUCKSHOT

NOW Parker moved.

With the speed of a pouncing hawk he jerked Joe before him, dropped his rifle, drew his revolver. And while Joe stared stupidly at his dead father, Parker's handgun spouted a vengeful stream of lead past him and above the grotesquely humped figure on the window-sill.

As his last shot cracked out, his captive tried to jerk aside and turn on him. Parker instantly hit him over the head with his empty weapon. As Joe sagged forward, the officer stooped and recovered his rifle. Straightening, still holding his prisoner with a mighty clutch, he backed and swerved into the corn.

There, without a second's delay, he tripped Joe and fell on him; twitched from a pocket a stout cord, and lashed his prisoner's feet together. Swiftly reloading his revolver, he pocketed it, again grabbed his rifle, and ducked onward for a few feet through the corn. Then, turning houseward, he dropped prone and wriggled to the edge of the maize-patch.

As Steve had foretold, the corn betrayed his movements, quivering above him as he progressed. Now the single-shot rifle banged again, and its heavy bullet ripped through the stalks nodding above the officer. It was so accurately placed that, had he been standing, it would have dropped him. But it passed a yard too high, and Parker's rifle began to crack in response.

Had the Coopers known that Joe was not close beside the officer, a spreading charge of buckshot might have finished Parker as soon as he paused to reload. But they did not know that; and, for fear of killing their brother, they confined their return firing to their rifle. While the Winchester was pumping they had scant opportunity to retaliate, for it swung back and forth, raking the windows on that side of the house. And when Parker had to suspend firing he was too canny to remain where he lay; he sprang up, dived aside and to the rear and, hugging the earth between weedy furrows, recharged his repeater while lying on his back. So, although the occasional slugs of the besieged men whizzed dangerously close to him, they continued to miss.

Now from Joe, reviving and assailed by a new fear, broke a stentorian yell.

"Jane! Take keer o' Jane!" he bellowed. "Put her down cellar! Don't let her git kilt!"

A growling answer rolled from within the house.

"She's awright. Git that detective!"

"Git him yerselves, ye whinin' pups!" raged the captive. "I'm tied hand an' foot. Can't ye hit nothin', ye ol' women?"

A curse echoed dully in response. At a corner of a window-sill a gun-muzzle glimmered and flamed toward the spot where Parker had last been seen. While its blue smoke still hazed the sill, a retaliating crack broke from the point where Parker really was. A sharp grunt and a jerky disappearance of the Cooper gun was followed by a clattering thump inside. Parker had hit something—man, gun, or both.

Meanwhile, to east and west of the house, there was no shooting. At the rear, where Steve ought to be, there had been none whatever. At the front, Hard found himself without a target. The entire defending force seemed to be concentrating its attention on the feared and hated government man in the corn.

From his position, Hard could see the prone body of Roberts and the rapidfire flashes of Parker's repeater, but nothing of the side windows where the Coopers fought. He knew nothing of the death of Old Bill. He saw nothing of Jed, of Copperhead, of Bad Bill. His vantage-point seemed useless. With a new purpose in mind, he began swiftly descending the cleft. He would rush the house at the front and get his enemies on the flank.

He was half-way down when a foot slipped. He sat down hard. One finger involuntarily jerked a trigger, and one barrel vomited a load which flew wild. With a wrathful growl at the mishap, he got to his feet. As he arose, some small object dropped behind him and then, with a metallic rattle, went bumping down into a crevice among the rocks.

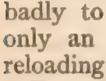
Clapping a hand to his right hip pocket, he muttered in dismay. Once more he had lost a powder-flask. He had shoved it into that rear pocket. The sudden fall had knocked it out. Now it was gone among the crevices. A swift scrutiny of the hole into which it had disappeared showed no sign of it.

An instant of indecision—then he sprang on downward. He still had one shot, and that one could do vast damage from the right point. He must get Jed, anyhow.

As if in answer, the face of Jed himself suddenly appeared at one of the two front windows. It was a wild, hunted face, pallid beneath the discolorations left there yesterday by Hard's punishing fists. Haunted by fear of deadly vengeance ever since his mistake in shooting Uncle Eb, he now had lost all courage under the hail of bullets fired by the revenue officer, and he was frenziedly seeking the shortest line of escape to the woods. At sight of the merciless Hard Wood again bounding toward him, he sprang back with a scream. A gun in his hands jumped and discharged wildly through the sash.

Like a swift, compact swarm of bees the buckshot hummed above Hard. In mid-stride he leveled his own piece and fired. Came another scream, a bump, the clatter of running feet. Jed might be hit, but not too badly to run. And now Hard possessed only an empty gun, with no means of reloading.

To enter that house now would be only insane suicide. Hard halted on the edge of the brook, wavering between the horns of a dilemma. He was unprotected, in plain sight, and far enough from his rocks to make retreat almost as dangerous as advance.



IT WAS keen-eyed Parker, carrying on his lone-handed battle with utmost coolness and seeing everything while he fought, who solved his difficulty. Parker knew nothing of the loss of the powder-flask, of course, but he knew how slow and clumsy was any muzzle-loader compared to a Winchester; and just now he wanted all the help he could get. Wherefore his incisive voice snapped across the open.

"Drop that blunderbuss and come git a real gun! Git Roberts'. I'll cover yuh. Look alive!"

Hard hesitated only a second. Then he made the dash. Dropping his useless piece, he pelted at top speed toward the dead man. As he came, Parker resumed his accurate sniping at the windows, driving his bullets so shrewdly that no counterfire was possible. He now was lying beyond Roberts, so that Hard did not have to run through his fire. The runner slewed to a stop beside the lifeless officer, seized the weapon, straightened up; then stooped again and unbuckled the cartridge-belt. With his new battery he plunged into the corn near Parker.

Parker chuckled. Hard answered with a reckless laugh. Then the officer commanded:

"Come here quick! Gimme that gun! You load this one!"

Hard obeyed without question. A repeating rifle was altogether new to him, and he did not understand its manipulation. As he reached Parker, the latter snatched the fresh rifle from him, but suspended firing, watching the windows for the first sign of a motion within. Crisply he ininstructed his recruit in the method of loading and ejecting, meanwhile never letting his gaze swerve from the house. As he finished speaking he shot again at something he had spied.

"Gimme my own gun back when she's loaded," he added. "It fits me better'n this. You scoot through the corn and git back to the front and hammer 'em hard."

Crash-crash!

The double report thundered from the left; from the rear of the house, whence no explosions had hitherto sounded.

"Your pardner's come to life," continued Parker. "About time! Got the hang o' your gun now? Then——"

Rrrrip! Bang! Crack!

Through the stalks hurtled a Cooper bullet, so close that shreds of leaf fell on Hard. The blunt report and the return shot from Parker almost blended.

"—then git goin'," finished the officer. "Don't let 'em skin out the other side, and we've got 'em!"

As he spoke, he passed back Roberts' rifle and seized his own, now reloaded. Without a word Hard arose and dashed down a furrow, heading creekward again. The corn was not tall enough to hide his head. He had gone only a couple of rods when two things occurred simultaneously.

A squash-vine amid the corn tripped and threw him headlong. At the same instant a charge of buckshot slashed through the spot where his shoulders had been. From the house roared a deep-throated gunshot.

Scrambling forward on all fours, he seized his fallen rifle and arose. Something warm and wet was trickling down his back, and something burned across his shoulder-blades. One of the flying shot had grazed him as he fell, and only his providential stumble had saved him from the rest of them. Across the corn he now saw a figure on the doorstone, protected by the corner of the house from Parker, peering toward him and lowering a gun from its shoulder. It was Copperhead.

With awkward speed Hard shot. The queer new gun seemed too short and all out of balance, and he fumbled over the levering of a fresh shell from the magazine. But he got away two bullets before Copperhead plunged indoors; and at the second shot, to his intense joy, his enemy lurched as if hit. Then Copperhead was gone. Exultant, Hard dashed onward.

Behind him, Parker's weapon sniped at quick, irregular intervals. From the rear of the house, where those two sudden roars had sounded, came no further noise.

Once more across the creek and among the trees, Hard pressed fast toward the big boulder; but he paused several times to snap a bullet at the front door or the windows flanking it. He saw nobody there, but it was a joy to fire on the Cooper lair with this quick-acting, hard-hitting weapon, even though it did feel odd at his shoulder; and he had plenty of ammunition. As soon as he reached his objective he would riddle the front as Parker was raking the sides, and between those crossfires the "varmints" soon would be in desperate straits.

But it was not to be. A silence fell, while Parker made another of his quick shifts and reloaded. Then from the house came a hoarse shout.

"MISTER! I give up! Don't shoot no more!"

Hard leaped to the edge of the trees. Nobody was in sight. The front door was open, but no man stood there. Nor was any man at any window. Old Bill, first of the Coopers to fall, had long ago been dragged inside by somebody crouching below the sill. The only human thing visible was rigid Roberts, face down in the grass.

"Mister! I got 'nough!" begged the voice. "Can I come out safe?"

"Who are yuh?" countered Parker.

"I'm young Bill. I'm the onliest one left here. I want to git outen here!"

Panic was in the hoarse tones. But Parker, with his partner lying dead before him as an example of Cooper methods, was not to be lured forth.

"Where's the rest of yuh?" he demanded.

"Pop's dead. I'm hurt. Jed an' Jerry, they run. Ye've got Joe. That's all of us — 'ceptin' Jane. She's down cellar. Promise me ye won't shoot no more? I'm givin' up, I tell ye!"

"Yuh can come out—with your hands in the air," conceded the hidden officer. "But if this is another trick, look out!"

Bad Bill wasted no time. Through the window he came, struggling out with such haste that he tumbled in a heap on the ground. Scrambling up, he lifted one hand high and began walking toward the corn.

"Put 'em both up!" snapped Parker.

"I can't, mister," whined Bill. "T'other arm's dead. Ye hit me."

The other arm was his right, and it dangled lifelessly beside him as he moved.

"All right. Come here to me. And the first funny move yuh make, I'll drill yuh."

Hard emerged from the trees. Bad Bill stopped short, eying him apprehensively. No doubt he recalled the day when he and Copperhead had menaced the stripling Wood with their guns at the creek and jeeringly prepared to murder him. Now that the tables were turned——

"Keep comin', you!" commanded Parker. "Wood, he's my prisoner!"

"Ye can have him," retorted Hard, contemptuously. "I'm a-goin' to look 'round over yender."

And he stalked onward, watching the house for any movement, any glint of steel. Bad Bill moved on with accelerated pace toward the protection of the man whom he had just tried so hard to kill. The fear of death was so strong upon him that even the waiting prison seemed a haven of refuge.

It was evident, both to Hard and to Parker, that Bill spoke truth in at least one respect: He was hurt. The dangling right arm was red from the shoulder. The left hand, above his head, also was crimson. And the left side of his face was dyed from a groove along his cheekbone and through the ear. He was as thoroughly shot up as he cared to be, and totally unable to handle a gun.

But what of Jed and Jerry? When and where had they run? Neither had been seen to leave. Jerry—Copperhead—had fired only a few minutes ago, and had lunged inside as if wounded. These thoughts excluded all others from Hard's mind. The gouge across his shoulders, rankling like the welt of a whip, goaded his hatred of that pair into fresh flame. And, with hammer drawn back and finger on trigger, he advanced to the front door.

The narrow hallway was empty. So were the rooms on either side. He looked through each window and made sure. Rounding the corner beyond, he checked.

There was another window, open to the southward; and on its sill was a red splotch. On the short grass beyond it were tiny red stains, leading away in a line to the south. That side of the house had been beyond the view of both Hard and Parker after Hard left his rock. Copperhead could have run from the door to that window, flung himself out, and made for the woods unseen—except by Steve. Certainly somebody had run here, somebody wounded.

Where on earth was Steve? Except for one double-barreled discharge, he had done nothing whatever. With another glance southward, Hard swung along the side of the building to complete his circuit.

At the next corner he again checked. Lounging along toward him from the direction of the barn came the missing Steve. Once more he was the old Steve, nonchalant, lazy, inscrutable, his double hammerless swaying carelessly from the crook of one arm as he walked. He was even smoking his pipe!

"'Lo, Hard," he drawled.

"Where ye been all the time? Thought ye was dead!" growled the other. "Seen Jed or Jerry?"

"Yup. Jerry, he run. Over yender." A jerk of the head toward the south.

"An' ye let him git away?"

" 'Course. He never done nothin' to me," Steve answered equably. "So I didn't do nothin' to him."

"Huh! What 'bout Jed?"

"He run too."

"Where?"

"Not very fur."

Steve was close at hand now, and in his calm eyes was something that caught the other's tongue. Steve puffed a couple of times, removed his pipe, spat, and moved toward a small woodpile near the back door. Hard followed.

On the other side of the pile, still clutching his gun, but lying flat on his back and staring dully up at the sky, lay Jed Cooper. Steve's double shot and Steve's present peaceful expression were explained. Jed was completely riddled.

"I figgered he'd come outen the back door," drawled Steve. "An' he did."

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST OF THE COOPERS

HARD WOOD wheeled and strode away, seeking anew the red thread upon the green which formed the trail of Copperhead.

Inwardly he raged at Steve for allowing that "varmint" to flee unhindered. Yet he realized that it might have been expected. Steve's inflexible purpose had been to slay Jed, and upon the fulfilment of that purpose had been concentrated the entire force of his nature. With the fall of Jed, the lethal demon within him had been instantly and completely satisfied; and with that appeasement he had reverted to his normal, casual, imperturbable self. Although Hard knew nothing of psychology or of dual personality, he sensed that within Steve abode two utterly different forces, and vaguely understood the motives which had impelled him to blow one Cooper to perdition but to watch unconcernedly the escape of another.

To Hard, however, the end of Jed was not the end of the Cooper affair, and upon the blood-trail of his bitterest personal enemy he now pushed forward with determination. It was not very easy to follow: A thin streak at first, and then merely a succession of spots. It led straight to the edge of the woods beyond the house—and then disappeared.

After a little casting about, however, he found it again. Once within the shelter of the trees, Copperhead had turned sharp to the right and headed for the creek. At the water's edge his trail vanished for the second time.

Hard understood. The fugitive, realizing that he was leaving telltale stains, had taken to the water. Apparently he was not badly hurt, not so badly as his brother Bill, for instance. But the tracker pressed hopefully on, jumping the stream and advancing along it by the path whereon he had first met Jane.

At the end of the path he stepped into the stream, and rapidly he climbed the steep ravine. Once, and once only, he found a red spot on a rock. Other rocks, though, showed splashes of water, indicating that Copperhead had kept going. At length even these failed as signs. Yet the trailer could discern no place at which his quarry had veered into the brush.

Panting, he emerged finally at the lake. There, after circling about both sides of the stream and searching the farther shores with his eyes he grudgingly abandoned his hunt. Copperhead had vanished without a trace. To seek him in the rugged wilderness stretching away for miles on every hand was sheer idiocy. The quickest way to find him would be to let him alone; for, if he remained in the Traps region—and it seemed decidedly unlikely that he would venture into the valley—he must soon appear somewhere in a quest for food. Hard resolved that he should find no food at the home which he had deserted.

As he wended his way back down the ravine, a metallic sound of irregular blows was wafted vaguely to him from some point below and off to the right. The noise soon died out. It brought him to a stand for a few minutes, listening and puzzling. Then the explanation occurred to him, and he resumed his progress. Parker had made his work complete: He had forced his prisoners to reveal the whereabouts of their still and to wreck it.

When he again reached the path beside the stream, all was quiet. In previously following this track, he had concentrated every sense on the hunt for his enemy. Now, his quest abandoned, he glanced at the well-remembered boulder whence he had once watched the blind girl; and, for no apparent reason, he again paused there and gazed ahead at the log whereon she had sat. Here the wildcat had sprung forth, and here he had knocked it aside as it leaped to rend her. And his reward was to see her wearing his mother's stolen dress—the dress which now, no doubt, had become soiled by cellar dirt and cobwebs. His hard mouth hardened still more. Steely pin-points glinted in his eyes. He swung forward again with sudden determination in his stride.

Emerging into the open, he heard angry voices and saw, in front of the house, the four men remaining from the fight. Steve, hands in pockets and shotgun idly drooping, and Parker, rifle still ready for use, stood a little apart from the two Coopers, saying nothing. The loud talk came from the prisoners, who were glaring at each other and exchanging most unbrotherly epithets. Bad Bill, last to quit the fight, was reviling Joe, first to be caught; cursing him as a traitor, a quitter, a killer of his own father. And Joe, already worn to the breaking-point by the torture of his own thoughts, was frothing furious invectives in return. Parker, shrewdly listening, was letting them have it out.

HARD quickened his pace to a lope. As he approached, he noted that Bad Bill had been bandaged, his broken arm now hanging in a sling and his shattered hand being wrapped in a wad of cloth. He observed, too, that Joe was filthy with dirt from the corn-field; evidently he had rolled and writhed in desperate efforts to free himself while Parker perforce neglected him. Parker himself was as little cleaner, his face and hands being so smeared with mingled dust and sweat that he resembled a streaky mulatto.

"Killer yerself!" blared Joe. "Ye kilt this feller out into the grass! The rifle's yourn, blast ye, an' ye used it onto him! An' ye'll swing for it, an' I'll spit on to yer grave!"

Bad Bill jerked back a step and stood rigid. Infuriated though he was, he recognized the deadliness of the accusation in the presence of Parker.

"Ye lie!" he burst out. "'Twas Jed done it! He scrooched behind pop an' shot under his arm. Pop told him to, an' he done it. 'Twarn't me."

"Liar yerself! Ye done it, an' ye're a-layin' it onto Jed 'cause he's dead!" raved Joe. "Ye'll swing—yah! Rope 'round yer neck an' rag 'round yer eyes— Ye killer! Ye burner! Ye stealer! Ye——"

Bill swung. He had only one movable hand, and that one was smashed; but he drove that hand into Joe's face so hard that his brother nearly fell. With a choking snarl Joe sprang back at him, raising both fettered wrists to dash the steel cuffs down on his antagonist's head. But Parker intervened.

Seizing Joe's shirt-collar, he yanked him back, tearing the shirt half off.

"That'll do, yuh mad dogs!" he snapped. "You, Joe! Stand back here or I'll clip yuh one! Now you, Bill, talk straight! Did yuh kill Roberts?"

Bill, his face contorted with pain from his own blow, gulped.

"Mister, I didn't!" he denied, earnestly. "If I had I'd never of give up to ye. I'd ruther be shot than hung."

His tone carried conviction. Parker, after a piercing look, nodded slightly. Then Hard, now standing grim and cold and watching, spoke out harshly.

"Bill! Wha'd ye burn my house for?"

Bill started, wheeled, and tried to outface his accuser. But after meeting the full force of the younger man's glare he swerved his gaze guiltily aside. Joe, with a note of savage triumph, seized his chance to denounce his accuser again.

"That's right, Hard! He done it. I wouldn't tell ye before, but I don't keer now, cuss him! 'Twas him an' Jerry—the yeller rat! They burnt ye out an' they stole from ye."

"I knowed some o' you varmints done it. 'Twas Copperhead too, hey? I'll git him yit. Wha'd ye do it for, ye snake?"

With a swift stride Hard thrust his face close to that of the incendiary. Bill flinched and fell back, throwing up his one good arm to shield his jaw. Then, as no blow came, he mumbled:

"We—uh—I dunno. We had some licker into us. Jerry—the stinkin' sneaker, he run an' left me here 'lone!—Jerry, he dast me to go burn ye out, an' I was pretty full, an' I went. An' we—uh—we set it afire."

"Did ye know I warn't to home when ye went there?"

"Wal—no—not when we set out. I was pretty full, an' I didn't think much 'bout it till Jerry got the fire goin'. He made it ag'inst the back o' the house. An' then I got scairt—burnin' a man into his bed was too much for me. I might shoot a feller, mebbe, but I can't burn nobody alive. So I throwed some rocks into the winders. An' when ye didn't come out we see ye couldn't be to home, an' we—uh——"

"Ye stole mom's chest, ye dirty grave-robber!"

"We—uh—wal, the fire was a-goin', an' says I, 'Le's grab somethin' while we kin,' an' we busted out a sash an' I crawled in. An' I run 'round quick, an' I couldn't see nothin' good but a chest. So I drug it outen the winder, an' we lugged it off. 'Twould only of burnt if we'd of left it there. It's into the house here now. Take it if ye—want it."

As he finished, he swayed on his feet, his leathery face turning gray. Hard, his fists twitching and his neck-veins swollen, was about to loose upon him a searing blast of verbal wrath; but at the sudden change in his foe the words stopped, unspoken. Bill was past caring what was said or done to him just now.

"I'm dizzy—sick," he croaked, and collapsed.

Wounds and reaction and hot sun had caught him all at once. He lay in a huddle, a pallid wreck. Hard turned from him with a growl.

"I can't do nothin' to *that*," he grumbled. "I'll wait till he gits out o' the pen."

"Yuh'll be gray-headed by that time," was Parker's significant comment. "Distillin' ain't all he's wanted for. What about that other one—that Jerry feller? I didn't hear yuh shoot."

"Nothin' to shoot at. Couldn't find hide or hair of him. But ye can leave him to me, mister. I've got more ag'inst him than you have."

The officer looked dour.

"I ain't in the habit o' losin' what I go after, whether it's one or a dozen," he grumbled. "But the way it lays, I've got pretty near a load to handle now, with Rob out o' the game." He considered a moment. "Yep, I'll have to travel. That feller that's still loose don't amount to much alongside these other fellers, and maybe I can pick him up later anyway— Hey, you! Come out o' that!"

His rifle muzzle darted toward the door, beyond which he had detected a movement. But then, as the heads of the other men jerked in the same direction, he let the weapon sink.

"Oh. Guess that's the girl they put down cellar," he said, in a milder tone. "Come on out, sister. The war's over."

SLOWLY, from the shadows within the portal, came Mis' Wood's flowery dress and the girl who wore it. Pale to the lips now was Jane; pale not with fright, but with shock and nameless dread. Already she was aware that her father was dead, for she had just stumbled over his body and ascertained whose it was. Too, she had caught Parker's last speech and learned from it that most of her brothers must be captives. Now, pausing on the doorsill with fingers against the casings, she stood forlorn, facing she knew not what. Slowly she turned her fair head, vainly striving to locate her brothers.

"Joe!" she called. "Where be ye, Joe? What's 'come of ye?"

"I'm here, Sis," gulped Joe. "But I—I got to leave ye. The revenooers have got me. I—I can't look out for ye no more. The onliest one of us that ain't caught is Jerry."

Now fear did dart into the sorrowful face in the doorway, swift, unmistakable fear.

"Jerry?" she cried. "Jerry! Oh, my Lord! I can't—I can't stay here with *him!* Ye know——"

She caught her tongue. But the unfinished sentence was eloquent. Joe turned suddenly, fiercely, to Hard and Steve.

"For God's sakes," he implored, "see that she's took keer of! An' if either o' ye sets eyes onto Jerry, shoot him like a rat! Don't let him git a holt o' Jane. There ain't nothin' that he wouldn't do, now that me an' pop's gone. He's rotten—rotten 'way through! Do ye understand me?"

The pair whom he addressed stared at him. Then their mouths hardened. Steve nodded. Parker, frowning, eyed the helpless girl, then spoke.

"Guess I'd better take her along. There's institutions where she'll be safe and——"

"No!" snapped Steve. "I know what ye mean. Them places ain't much better'n jails, 'specially for hill folks that can't stand livin' into a coop. She'll stay here. Us hill folks takes care of our own."

Parker probed his aggressive eyes, then nodded. He had no desire to encumber himself with the girl if such action was unnecessary.

"An' lemme tell ye somethin' else while I'm a-talkin'," pursued Steve. "This feller Joe, he's the best o' the lot, 'ceptin' the gal. He never done no harm to nobody. Outside o' sellin' a little 'shine there ain't a thing ag'inst him nowheres. If ye'll kind o' keep that into mind an' try to git him off light, ye'll be doin' right."

"I ain't the judge and jury," countered Parker. "But I don't think he'll draw a heavy sentence. You'll look out for the girl, then, will yuh? All right. You, Bill! Git up and travel! You can walk. No more layin' down! There's a wagon waitin' for yuh at the road, and from there yuh can ride. Up with yuh!"

Under the lash of his voice, Bad Bill struggled groggily up and stood, haggard and swaying, but keeping his feet. Parker turned a speculative gaze on Joe.

"Somebody's got to tote Roberts to the road, and it's a long carry," he meditated aloud. "He's bigger'n this feller, and—How about yuh, Oaks? Will yuh lend a hand? Yuh haven't overworked yourself, so far. Wood here has been doin' the legwork."

"Wal, seein' that it'll be helpin' Joe, mebbe I might," drawled Steve. "Hard, ye want to git at that chest o' yourn, I s'pose. Wal, I'll go 'long. When I git back we'll take Jane up to Uncle Eb's."

Hard made no reply. Reluctantly he extended the rifle to Parker.

"Here's yer gun, mister," he said. "I'd admire to git me one like it sometime."

The officer opened his mouth to reply, but, for a moment, said nothing. He squinted at the rifle, eyed the tall young mountaineer quizzically, and gave a short chuckle.

"Tell yuh what I'll do," he decided. "I don't want two guns to look out for right now, with prisoners and drivin' on my hands. So I'll lend yuh the gun until—well, until I see yuh again. That is, providin' yuh'll promise one thing: That if yuh run across this Jerry feller yuh'll either hand him over to the law or drop him for keeps. How's that suit yuh?"

Hard smiled broadly.

"Suits me, mister, suits me fine. Only don't lay awake nights waitin' for me to fetch him in alive."

"I won't." Parker's right eyelid flickered, and he turned away. "Come on, Oaks. Git goin', you two!"

Bad Bill staggered away, without a word for the forlorn little figure in the doorway. But Joe, before obeying the command, took one long look at her and murmured huskily:

"G'by, Janie. I'll be a-comin' back, soon as I kin."

"G'by, Joe," she mournfully returned.

As his footsteps receded in the grass she turned her wide eyes after him. Then her lips quivered, and all at once she leaned against the door jamb and sobbed.

Across to the body of Roberts passed Joe; and there, with a sharp warning to try no tricks, Parker unlocked his handcuffs. Meanwhile Steve, slinging his gun across his back by loops in his suspenders, stepped to the house and unhinged a shutter. This he dragged to the spot where waited captor and captives; and on it, with Steve ahead, Joe behind, and Parker vigilantly following, the sleuth who had paid the penalty of one false step was borne away. Led by the reeling Bill, the funereal little procession trudged around the near corner of the corn field and was gone from the sight of the one fighter remaining behind.

Slowly that man belted with a dead man's cartridges and gripping a dead man's rifle, let his gaze rove over the scene. The corn, rustling in a soft breeze, nodded and whispered mysteriously to itself. The bullet-splintered house gloomed dingy and deserted, save for one quietly weeping girl at its main portal. Within it, a gross huddle of whisky-soaked flesh, lay its master. Behind it, at the woodpile, sprawled one of the two brutes who had abandoned it in fear of death, only to meet his doom within a dozen steps. Beyond it, somewhere—perhaps far, perhaps near—skulked the other of those two, wounded by the lead of the man who now eyed it with hostile gaze. The den of the Cooper varmints had failed to save them at the end; and in Hard Wood's mind the doom of the den itself was already sealed.

His gaze swung onward, searching the treeline, and came back to dwell once more on the house. Then, gripping his gun a little harder, pressing his lips a little tighter, he advanced inexorably toward the last of the Coopers.

CHAPTER XVI

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

JANE lifted her head and straightened up, her tear-filled blue eyes turned toward the oncoming man. Involuntarily he slowed, smitten by a qualm at sight of her grief. Then his eyes slipped from the flowery face to the flowery dress which was not hers, and his mouth again became stern.

"Set down an' keep quiet," he ordered.

Extending a hand, he grasped one of hers and swung her outside on the doorstone. She clung to that strong guiding hand after he had moved her aside, and he had to twist it a little in order to free it.

"Ye're Hard Wood—my 'stranger'," she breathed. "Ye've been my friend—but ye ain't friendly-like now. I feel it. Have ye been killin' my folks, Hard?"

"Been a-tryin'. 'Tain't my fault I didn't kill the hull o' ye."

He strode inside, leaving her alone.

Into each of the front rooms he shot a glance, finding no sign of his chest. The one at the right was small and sparsely furnished as a bedroom—Jed's and Jerry's, perhaps, for it was here that Copperhead had first shown his face and later escaped. The other was the living-room, and larger; littered with masculine things, hats, pipes, greasy cards on a disordered table, and so on, and furrowed and splintered by Parker's bullets and Hard's buckshot. Passing onward, he found two more rooms opening off each other; and in the right-hand one was what he sought.

This, too, was a bedroom, and far from clean. Tobacco ashes, dried mud on the floor, an old coat, dirty boots, all showed it to be a male sleeping-place. Beyond the unmade bed, under the window, stood the chest with the bronze fittings—scratched and sullied, and punctured in several places by spent bullets. With a growl, he strode in and lifted its lid.

The sight of its contents evoked a fiercer growl. It was packed now with Cooper winter wear, overcoats, mufflers, and similar things, put away to avoid moths. As he yanked the clothing out, he found no trace of his mother's treasures.

Throwing aside the Cooper clothes, he lifted the empty chest, gave it a swing, and heaved it through the window. Then he stamped into the other room, where he halted short. This was the spot where the fiercest of the fight had centered, and where, on the floor at one side of the window, still lay Old Bill. The open eyes of the corpse were staring toward the invader.

This was the first time Hard had seen the head of the Cooper tribe since his death, and momentarily he stood stock still, held spellbound by that dire stare. Then, advancing and shifting his gaze, he surveyed the thoroughly wrecked room. It evidently was the kitchen. Except the stove and the woodbox, virtually everything was overturned or smashed. A wood-cased clock on a shelf, however, though nicked by several shots, still was intact and industriously measuring off the minutes. On that clock Hard fixed his gaze for a moment, noting the time—a quarter to ten. Mentally he made a rapid calculation. It was two miles from here to the road, and Steve would hardly reappear in less than an hour. There was plenty of time for what Hard had in mind.

Three more doorways opened into this room. From one, dark and cavernous, floated the damp odor of the cellar. The one beyond it seemed to lead into another room. The third, in the rear wall, opened outdoors, and through it he glimpsed the woodpile beside which lay Jed. Tramping over the broken glass, spilled powder, undried blood, and other vestiges of the fight which littered the floor, he went to the middle door, and found himself peering into the room of the blind girl.

It was the poorest in the house, yet the neatest. A mere cubby of a place, it held only a narrow bed, a small stand on which lay a hairbrush, and a curtain hanging from a shelf across the farther end. But the bed was made up and the floor far cleaner than any other he had seen here. An apron, hanging across the footboard, showed clearly whose room it was.

Soft footsteps approaching from the front of the house drew him sharply around. Then came a voice, low but anxious; the voice of Jane.

"Hard, where be ye?"

"Here. Into the kitchen."

"Oh." Her voice was relieved. "I—I can't set out there all alone now. Seems as if I feel things a-crawlin' up to me. What was that bumpin' I heard into here?"

She was in the kitchen now, moving with the ease of long familiarity, yet shrinking toward the inner wall as if she could see or feel the grisly stare of her father. The broken glass littering the floor seemed not to injure her bare soles.

" 'Twas me. A-throwin' out my chest. Wha'd yer tribe do with mom's things?"

"Do with what? What ye talkin' about?"

"Aw, don't try to be so innocent!" he snapped. "Ye're a-wearin' my mom's dress—stole from a dead woman!—an' ye know it as well as I do. An' ye know what they done with the rest o' her things. Where be they? Where's her gold pin an' all?"

She stopped, her color deepening, her hands going to her dress. With a flash of spirit she retorted:

" 'Tain't so! This dress is my own! Pop, he bought it for me down to New Paltz—this an' some more with it. I never heard of a gold pin. Ye're crazy. Bill, he brought home an old chest from somewheres awhile ago, but I dunno what ye mean by sayin' it's yourn. Don't ye 'cuse us o' stealin'!"

His lips curled. Cooper lies! As if she had not heard the whole matter discussed time and again! And she had the gall to try to outface him.

"Think I'm a fool?" he demanded. "Show me them other dresses!"

She confronted him defiantly. But then, with a sigh, she moved past him and went to the curtain pendent from the shelf. Pushing this aside, she passed her hands over garments hanging from pegs on the wall.

"Here they be," she said. "An' they're mine, no matter what ye say."

Stepping toward her, he took one quick survey. One of the garments hanging there was indubitably his mother's—the white one in which she had been married. About the other feminine things he was not so sure.

"An' yer pop give 'em to ye, did he?" he mocked. "Wal, now I'll give ye one that fits ye better—this one here." He twitched loose a faded blue frock which he knew had never belonged to his mother. "Now ye git outen that one an' into this one, an' hurry up! Mind what I tell ye!"

WITH that he stalked out. Returning to the front, he stepped outside and keenly scanned the surroundings; for somehow the girl's statement that she had felt things "crawlin' up" bothered him. Nothing new could be discerned. He turned back, and was about to reenter, when a gliding shape on the ground near the house caught his eye. It was a snake.

A closer look told him that it was only a "striped adder," or non-venomous garter snake. But it was a large one, and, with natural loathing for all its repulsive class, he killed it by a blow from his rifle. As he returned within doors he pondered on the girl's sensitiveness. Something *had* been crawling to her; something which would alarm any woman, even though it was harmless. Her perception of things which she could not see, and could hardly be expected to hear, seemed uncanny.

Up the narrow stairway he climbed, entering the last room of the house—an attic which, like most of the other rooms, seemed to be a sleeping-place. Various dusty odds and ends of furniture, besides the bed, were ranged carelessly along under the eaves. One, less dusty than the rest, was a long chest; larger than his own, though of much cruder workmanship. Trying to lift the lid, he found it locked.

Stepping back a pace, he leveled his rifle at the key-hole and shot. The heavy slug smashed the lock and split the surrounding wood. His next tug at the lid lifted it with little difficulty, and he tumbled the contents out on the floor

They consisted mainly of spare bedding; quilts and blankets. Wondering why such articles should be kept under lock and key, however, he sorted them over. Out from among them tumbled a tin box.

It was an oblong tobacco can, large enough to hold a pound of slice-cut. Around it was a strong cord, frayed from many untyings and reknottings. On removing this and turning back the lid, he found the tin nearly full of money.

"M-hm!" he grunted. No wonder this was kept locked up! It was Old Bill's bank.

The money was all in notes. As Hard counted it, his eyes widened. It totaled nearly eight hundred dollars. Eight hundred dollars, at a time when hard-working men counted themselves well paid at a dollar a day, was a small fortune. Old Bill had accumulated a handsome profit from his "charcoal" business.

The thought brought a sardonic smile to Hard's face. Replacing the bills in the box and retying the cord, he commented:

"Thank ye. I'll jest take this 'long to pay for the charcoal-burnin' ye done down to my house. When I git ready to build me a new place, this 'shine money'll build it an' leave some over for fixin's. Much 'bliged!"

Back to the stairs he went, and, descending, back to Jane's room. He found her sitting on the bed, gowned now in the worn frock he had handed her, but holding on her lap the flowery dress and stroking it with her sensitive finger tips. Down her cheeks were slipping two big tears.

She spoke no word. Spying the tears, he frowned again. Bruskly he told her: "I'm a-goin' outside. Git yer things together—'specially them dresses—on to the bed. After ye go 'way from here ye ain't comin' back."

Again he went out. Again he saw nothing new. Walking around to the chest, he got it on his back and trudged away toward the Minnewaska slope. After an arduous portage he set it under a shelving rock and returned to the clearing, where he retrieved his abandoned muzzle-loader from the grass beside the creek.

Thereafter he worked fast. Ascending once more to the attic, he picked out the best quilt and blankets, and these he carried down to the door. In Jane's room he gathered up the pitifully small heap representing all her possessions and bade her follow him. Mindful of the broken glass, he led her through the back door, and thence around the house. On the front doorstep he laid the feminine things on the blankets. Then, going to the barn, he got rope, and with this he returned and corded all the cloth into a compact bundle.

"Now come over here a little ways," he directed.

Again, unquestioning, she followed the faint rustle of his footsteps in the grass. He took her to the edge of the corn, and there he dropped his bundle and told her to sit on it while he stepped back to the house.

"Hard," she said then, low-voiced, "tell me jest what's 'come of all of us. Bill an' Joe's gone with——"

"A revenooer," he supplied. "Yer pop an' Jed got shot. Jerry, he run. You're goin' to—'nother place. Now set still."

Back to the barn he loped, seeking livestock. Only pigs and fowls were there, shut in the cellar; for the horses had been seized with the "charcoal" wagon at the time of Joe's arrest, and the cows and the colt had been driven early to pasture, farther back in the woods. Hard shooed out all the fowls, which departed with angry squawks at his roughness; and then, opening the hog-pen, he evicted the porkers by kicks and blows. Emerging, he shut the doors, drove the pigs farther away, and strode to the house.

At the woodpile he stooped and, with a grimace, gripped Jed by the arms. Through the back door he dragged him, to drop him beside his father. Then from behind the stove he lifted a big oil-can and some kindlings.

"If ye shot me," he addressed the pair on the floor, "would ye bury me? Not much, ye wouldn't. No more will I bury you."

And he stalked past them, left the room, and laid his tinder at the foot of the stairs; drenched the stairs with kerosene; tossed the can aside, lighted matches, and set the flames to work. With a hiss they swept up the staircase.

Once more he ran to the barn. In its hay he started another fire. When it was well under way he loped to the corn.

"Another o' them 'jedgments' folks talk about," he muttered as he went. "An eye for an eye, an' a tooth for a tooth, an' a burnin' for a burnin'—that's 'jedgment!' An' I ain't through jedgin', neither."

Again he looked grimly into the questing face of the last remaining Cooper, sitting mute at the edge of the sword-bladed maize. Then he spoke to her.

"We'll be a-goin'. Straight through the brush. Lemme git that bundle onto my back."

"Where's Uncle Eb live? Nigh?" she questioned, rising obediently.

"Right north. That's the way we're a-goin'—right north."

From the house came a slight crackling sound, but she did not hear it; for a lusty breeze was blowing now, from the north, and the loud rustling of the corn-blades filled her ears. Yet she lifted her face, in that odd way of hers, and held her eyes toward the dwelling where she had always lived.

"Will they be good to me at Uncle Eb's?" she asked, hesitantly.

"As good as Jed or Jerry was to ye here." His tone was sarcastic. Her face clouded still more.

"I s'pose I've got to go there," she sighed. "An' it's been pretty bad here since mom died. But this is the onliest place I ever knowed, an'—an'—I jest hope they'll be good to me at Uncle Eb's. I—I ain't much good to work."

Again he was assailed by a twinge of pity and doubt. But it passed. He twitched his shoulders to settle the roped pack, shut a fist around the barrels of both his guns, grasped her nearer hand with the other, and gruffly commanded—

"Come on!"

Along the edge of the corn he led her to the creek. There he picked her up and carried her across. On the farther side they resumed their tandem formation; the man ahead, carrying pack and guns, the tobacco-box bank bulging his shirt at one side, his gun-hand shoving aside branches or bushes, his other extended backward to the girl; Jane behind, responsive to the guiding of those sinewy fingers, her feet feeling their way past root and stone, her entire consciousness concentrated now on the task of progress. Except for occasional directions, no more words were spoken.

Slowly they passed onward and were gone. Behind them, a gradually thickening cloud of smoke was beginning to befoul the clear blue sky—a sinister smudge which soon was to bring hurrying toward it half the men of the Traps, who now were excitedly discussing the prolonged gunfire which had echoed far and wide from the Cooper place. Before them, invisible at the north, lay the little yellow house of Uncle Eb, where the unfortunate girl hoped to find a new home whose habitants would not be harsh. But many a long day was to pass before the people of the Wilham household were to see this hard youth or the girl who now followed him.

CHAPTER XVII

JUDGMENT

BETWEEN the home of Uncle Eb and that of his nearest neighbor, the sandy hill-road of the Traps made several slight bends. It was midway of this section, and out of sight from any house, that Hard and his convoy chanced to emerge from the brush. Determined and defiant toward all his world, he was making no particular effort to evade observation; but neither was he parading his purpose before inquisitive eyes. And now, finding the road empty at that point, he made an odd move.

Before stepping into the highway he turned to Jane, who had stopped when she felt him pause. Briefly informing her that he would carry her a few steps, he lifted her in his arms and walked backward across the sand. On the farther side he smiled slightly as he surveyed the tracks he had made. To anyone who might notice them later, those footprints would not advertise the fact that here a man and a girl had gone toward Dickie Barre. On the contrary, they would indicate that a lone man had journeyed toward the Cooper place, where dense black smoke now was streaming southward on the wind.

Toward that smudge his gaze now lifted, and for a moment he stood watching it with savage satisfaction. Then, setting the girl on her feet, he grasped her hand again and guided her along a grassy lane into a hummocky field. Beyond, they traveled along the sides of the knolls, without attempt at concealment on his part, but without attracting observation; for by this time the interest of everybody thereabouts was centered to the southward, and, with the news beginning to fly about that some of the Coopers had been shot and others arrested, virtually all outdoor work was temporarily deserted. When the leader and the led left the field it was to enter a bypath, and along this they traveled for some time in silence. As before, Jane was so intent on her movements that she had little thought to spare for other matters.

At length, however, she called a halt. Unused to walking any great distance, and tired as well by the strain of constant attention to her footing, she now was thoroughly fatigued.

"Wait!" she panted. "I'm tuckered out!"

A few feet farther on stood a knee-high, flat-topped stone. Without comment, he led her to it and released her. She felt the stone with her hands, than sank on it. Resting his guns on the ground, he squatted, without removing his pack. He felt a bit leg-weary himself after his active morning.

Squatting there, he frowned as he observed that her feet were bruised from contact with stones. He had led her as skilfully as he could, but he now realized that he had walked too fast. Yet she had made no complaint; nor, despite the mute evidence of the reddened toes, did she make any now. A grudging admiration stirred in him. She was no whining sniveler.

When she had rested a little, she asked again:

"Ain't we 'most there? Seems like we've come 'most a hundred mile. How fur is Uncle Eb's?"

"From your place to Uncle Eb's, through the brush, is two mile," he answered coolly. " 'Tain't much farther now to where ye're a-goin'. Seems an awful long ways to you, o' course, 'cause ye ain't used to walkin'. An' we've had to travel slow."

Literally true, yet deceptive. They had already walked more than four miles, and were not yet at the end. But to untraveled Jane a mile had always been a vague, very long distance, and she accepted his statement without suspicion. Curiosity prompted her, though, to ask:

"What was that place where ye carried me? An' why did ye stop?"

" 'Twas a place I didn't want ye to step on to," was his noncommittal reply. "An' I was a-lookin' at—at a hornets' nest that a feller burnt. When ye're ready we'll go 'long."

With a little difficulty she arose, wincing a bit at the twinges of her sore feet, but making no whimper.

"Then le's go an' git it done. I'm ready." And, without hesitation, she extended her hand.

He eyed her soberly, wavering a little in his purpose. He glanced back along the way they had come, biting his lower lip and rubbing his jaw. He could turn her about and lead her to Uncle Eb's, after all, without her knowledge of where she had been. But——

His eyes went to the contused toes. His memory went to sharp-tongued Mis' Wilham, who now would be far from gracious in her remarks anent any Cooper. His hand went to meet Jane's, and his feet moved forward on the way he had been traveling. What he had begun in a spirit of uncompromising retaliation he must finish.

NOW, however, he moved more slowly and carefully, and saw to it that the following feet stubbed against no more stones. And when he forsook the path and began the stiff climb leading to the rock blocks at the left, he went still more carefully, holding bushes aside until she could pass, and warning her of every obstruction. On reaching the jagged boulders themselves he followed a roundabout course which made the going easier for her, and in some spots he lifted her bodily upward or across the safe footing.

"For the Lord's sakes!" she expostulated. "Where be ye a-takin' me, Hard? This is awful! There can't be nobody a-livin' into a place like this!"

"It's kind o' rough into here," he admitted calmly. "But ye've got to climb up jest a little more, an' then ye'll be there."

She listened a moment. Then she turned to him a face in which he read open suspicion.

"There ain't no house here!" she asserted. "There ain't a sound of a house or a field—not a hen, not a grasshopper! We're into the woods an' the rocks— Hard! What be ye doin' with me?"

"Don't argue 'bout it! Ye're a-goin' where ye're a-goin', an' ye can talk later on."

She tried to draw away from him. The effort was futile, for he tightened his grip and held her powerless. Laying his guns on a rock, he swung her off her feet and carried her on toward the rift in the stone marking his portal. And there, breathing hard, he set her down and spoke again.

"Ye're a-goin' up through a hole here an' down on t'other side. If ye do jest what I tell ye, ye'll be all right. If ye do any other way ye'll git hurt bad."

"Git hurt bad," she repeated. "What'll hurt me?"

"Rocks. Ye'll fall."

"Oh. An' s'posin' I don't fall—then what'll 'come of me?"

"Then ye won't git hurt. No way at all."

She was silent a moment, turning this over in her mind. Then, with a tremulous little smile:

"All right. I'll do like ye tell me."

"Ye'd better."

It was no easy feat to pass her safely through the one small, high opening, but he managed it. First he told her exactly what she must do, and made sure that she remembered his instructions. Leading her then into the rift, he braced his feet firmly, squatted, and gripped her ankles. Slowly, smoothly, he straightened up, while she balanced herself with knees rigid and hands creeping up the stony wall. Reaching his full height, he raised his hands chest-high, lifting her without slip or loss of equilibrium to the brink of the entrance hole. There she could aid herself. Obediently she drew herself through the gap, felt her way straight ahead along the shelf, and lay still.

Climbing after her, he then lowered her to the rock platform, and, again following, guided her down his rough-and-ready stairs. On the lowest step he seated her and left her while he went back to retrieve his guns. When these and the bedding roll were passed in, he once more traversed shelf and stepping stones and stood beside his prisoner in his primitive fortress.

"Now, Miss Cooper," he said sternly, "ye're at the end. Ye're a long ways from Uncle Eb's or anybody else's, an' it won't do ye no good to holler. Ye're into a pen—a stone pen, like Bill an' Joe are a-goin' to be. They're a-goin' to stay into their pen till they've paid for what they done, an' ye're a-goin' to stay into yourn till ye've paid for the clo'es ye stole."

Her color ebbed. Then it flowed again hotly, and she sprang up, heedless of what the footing might be.

"I stole? I never! I've told ye——"

"I ain't forgittin' what ye told me. It's lies. Ye never went to my house an' stole them dresses, but ye knowed they were stole an' ye used 'em; an' anybody that takes things that have been stole is as bad as the stealer. Ye knowed Bill an' Jerry stole them things—ye must of heard 'em crowin' 'bout it, an' 'bout how they burnt me out. Don't try to tell me no dif'rent. If ye hadn't had no other clo'es, an' wore them stole dresses because ye had to, there'd be some excuse for ye. But ye've got other clo'es—ye've got 'em on now—an' they fit ye a lot better'n my mom's, too, an' they must be more comf'table. So there ain't no excuse for ye at all, an' ye'll serve yer time."

His tone was cold, dispassionate, inexorable as that of a judge in court solemnly pronouncing sentence on a convicted criminal. Again she paled, staring blankly toward him, various emotions flitting over her face—bewilderment, doubt, dread. Once she tried to smile, as if feeling that this must be some practical joke; but the effort failed. Then some inner strength rose to her aid, and she became steady and calm.

"Hard Wood," she said, "I ain't goin' to argue with ye. I've heard 'bout ye. I know ye ain't got no mercy on to man or woman when ye're mad, an' 'tain't no use to say nothin' more to ye. But I'm a-sayin', jest the same, that ye're wrong, awful wrong, an' sometime ye're a-goin' to know it. How long be ye goin' to keep me here?"

"Till I git ready to let ye go."

"That means till ye git over yer mad an' git 'shamed of yerself. I don't think that'll be very long, Hard Wood. Be ye goin' to leave me here all 'lone with the snakes an' things?"

"There ain't no snakes into here. But I ain't leavin' ye 'lone. This is where I live. Yer sneakin' brothers put me into this rock-hole, 'long o' burnin' my house. An' I might as well tell ye now that I've paid 'em up for that. I set yer hull place afire 'fore we come away, an' by now it's burnt to the ground, same as my house was."

Again she paled. For a moment she stood motionless. Somewhere above sounded a long sigh of wind among pine branches. Unconsciously she echoed it, drawing a deep breath of mute farewell to the roof which had always been her shelter.

"So everything's gone," she murmured. "Everything. Mom an' pop, an' all the boys, an' the house—an' everything. An' I'm here into the rocks, lost. But I ain't afraid o' ye, Hard Wood. I ain't to blame for what's come. An' ye're goin' to be 'shamed of yerself, Hard, awful 'shamed. I know it."

He made no answer. He stood regarding her steadily, stonily, yet with involuntary admiration and a vague misgiving. This slip of a girl, homeless, helpless, sightless, possessed a courage deeper than his own, a resolute confidence before which he felt abashed. The walls of the natural dungeon to which he had brought her, the austere sentence he had pronounced on her, could not crush her spirit. Rather, they seemed to strengthen it. Instead of cringing before his ruthless judgment she met it with prophecy. And, despite himself, he knew that that prophecy would prove true.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE DUNGEON

HARD WOOD was glum.

Sweet though revenge had been when he fired the house of his enemies, the taste of his retribution upon Jane Cooper now was sour in his mouth. Sour, though she had served only three days of the indeterminate sentence which he had imposed on her. So sour, indeed, that it jaundiced his sight and transformed his care-free cavern into a cheerless dungeon to which he had committed not her alone—but himself.

In all his unrelenting life thus far, he had never failed to exact whatever reparation he deemed due or to derive complete satisfaction from such retaliation. Whatever punishment seemed fitting at the time had been meted out in full, and thereafter no twinge of regret had troubled him. But now, for the first time, he was repenting at leisure a hasty action.

His suddenly conceived and inflexibly executed plan of imprisoning the last of the Coopers for receiving and using stolen goods had almost lost its savor before he actually reached the rocks of expiation; but he had carried it through. Now he would have given the looted tobacco-box bank and all it contained to obliterate his harsh judgment of three days agone. Jane's prophecy was already fulfilled. He knew he had been wrong, and he was ashamed.

In these three days she had not pleaded with him, had not argued with him, had not sought to soften his will by tears. With innate stoicism she had accepted the situation, and, with a serene confidence incomprehensible to him, she awaited the end of her durance. But she had again denied the guilt of which he accused her; denied it with a quiet sincerity which convinced him despite himself. Too, she had steadfastly maintained that the new dresses had been given her by her father; and this also he was forced to believe.

"I never heard nothin' 'bout yer house bein' burnt," she declared, "nor 'bout things bein' stole. I never listened to what was said 'mongst the men 'ceptin' at the table or times when I couldn't help it. After mom went they were always cussin' an' talkin' rough, an' I didn't like it, an' I left 'em 'lone all I could. I even used to put my head under the piller when I went to bed, so's I wouldn't have to listen to 'em!

"Ye say Bill owned up to ye, 'fore he went away, that him an' Jerry burnt yer house an' stole things. I didn't hear that, but if ye say he did, I s'pose it's so. But if they done that, they done it without pop knowin'. Pop, he never wanted the boys to go meddlin' with nobody; he told 'em 'twould only make folks come snoopin' 'round our place, tryin' to hit back. Pop says:

" 'Ye leave folks 'lone, an' make 'em leave ye 'lone. If anybody comes 'round here make 'em git out an' stay out, but long's nobody bothers ye, don't ye bother nobody. If ye do I'll handle ye so's ye won't forgit it.'

"An' about them dresses, it's jest like I told ye. Pop, he went down to the valley, an' the next day when he come back I was up into the woods a little ways, an' he was to home awhile 'fore I come in. An' when I did come in he was a-fightin' with some o' the boys. I guess Jerry was one, 'cause I heard him a-screechin' awful, an' pop a-yellin', 'I'll learn ye!' An' I went back into the woods till 'twas quiet down there to the house. An' when I went to set down into my chair to eat, there was some dresses onto it. An' pop says:

" 'I got ye some new clo'es, gal, down to the village. Yer old ones are gittin' kind o' wore out, an' seein' yer mom ain't here no more to make 'em for ye I got some store dresses. See how ye like 'em.' An' when I put 'em on they were too big. But pop says, 'I got 'em kind o' big, 'cause ye might grow bigger to fit 'em.' An' I was awful pleased—they're the onliest store clo'es I ever had. An' they're mine, like I tell ye. Pop bought 'em an' give 'em to me, an' they can't be yourn."

Hard made no retort to this. Her tone, her words, rang true, and her quiet air carried conviction. Pondering over her account of the circumstances connected with her acquisition of the new dresses, he saw them from an entirely different angle.

The fight of which she spoke probably had been caused by Old Bill's discovery of the chest, and, through it, of the deed committed by his sons in his absence. His rage and his violence would be due, not to any regret for the crime, but to the fact that they had disobeyed his orders. Having wreaked his anger on his insubordinate offspring, he would then think how to make use of the proceeds of their theft; and the logical use for dresses would be to give them to his girl, meanwhile posing as a thoughtful father.

He had not given her the gold-and-amethyst brooch, for he could make money on that. No doubt he had sold it for what he could get when he took his next cargo to town. The people with whom he dealt would not ask too many questions.

Yes, that would be the way of it. But the thinker made no attempt to argue these details with Jane. The one important matter was not what she believed, but what that belief proved. In the end he had to concede that it proved her innocence. Therefore she was unjustly condemned and serving an undeserved sentence.

This conclusion, however, was not reached immediately. The youth who never before had felt himself to be in the wrong, who had ruthlessly punished every man incurring his wrath, and who had virtually defied his God, could not at once reverse himself now. Within him wrestled two mighty forces: His headstrong will and his sense of justice. Hitherto these twain had always worked together; now they turned on each other. Until one of them triumphed he could know no peace nor order the way he should go.

SO, FOR three days Hard and Jane lived a strange life. He, the jailer, found himself serving his captive. She could do no cooking on his crude rock stove; to attempt it would be to endanger her life, since a treacherous tongue of flame might at any instant seize upon her dress; and thus he must perforce prepare the meals and put them before her. Utterly unfamiliar with her new surroundings, she could not even walk about in safety; and he worked to make the rough floor more passable, carrying stones and trying to fill in the inequalities. At first he even had to make her bed, giving up to her his couch of bough tips and spreading thereon the bedding he had taken from the Cooper attic.

He himself moved to the extreme outer edge of the roofed room and, rolled in his blankets, slept uncomfortably on bare rock. Because of her, he could not rest well by day or by night. In the dark hours he often started awake, listening tensely until he caught the barely audible sound of regular breathing and knew that all was well. In the daytime he was much less at ease; for then there gnawed at him a subconscious fear lest, in moving about, she might meet some calamity.

Some deadly snake might creep in here and strike her. She might injure herself badly on the stones. Something might fall; he caught himself staring apprehensively at the overhang which he had once derided, but which looked dangerous now that she lay beneath it. Never before had he feared anything, real or imaginary. But now, somehow, it was vastly different. Everything was changed. His cave grew odious to him. Yet he could not leave it for more than a few minutes at a time.

Curiously enough, he felt no desire to go to the three maples and consult the silent half-moon stone, as he had previously done when troubled or perplexed. Several times the idea arose vaguely in his mind, but instinctively he shied away from it. He did not know why; did not clearly realize even that the thought was there. The fact was that deep down in his soul he was ashamed to go to that spot, ashamed to face the invisible presence of his mother while he was holding this girl in bondage.

There was little talk between the two. With unbroken patience, she calmly awaited his admission that he was wrong. With increasing impatience he grappled with himself, seeking adjustment. Unanalytical, unintrospective, he did not know just what was taking place within him. He knew only that he was not ready to release her and that he was mentally miserable while holding her.

Several times, as a surcease from struggle, he forced his thoughts into another channel. Taking the tobacco box from the crevice where he had stowed it away, he counted the money and visioned the new house which he would eventually build with it, a brand new house, spick and span, solid and comfortable—a better home than he had ever known since coming to the Traps. Sometimes he fancied it on the site of his old one, sometimes he played with the thought of erecting it somewhere along Peters Kill, where the brawling water delighted him and the rhododendron bloomed wondrously in July. Seven hundred and eighty-seven dollars, that box held. With his own labor, he could build a Traps palace on that money, or so he thought. And on Cooper money! Old Bill had 'shined and smuggled and saved and gotten himself shot—all to build a house for an enemy! Ha!

But the vision always ended in the same way. He was back in his rocky dungeon, somberly eying the last of the Coopers, dwelling on the patient face which yet was so aloof. Then he shut up the box and resumed his struggling.

Another apparition arose to confront him. It was the Future; and a grinning, grisly phantom it was. He would have to let her out, of course. He had never intended to hold her here permanently. But then, he supposed, she must go to Uncle Eb's; and, though Uncle Eb himself would be unfailingly kind to the waif, his wife would be more than likely to hurt her cruelly with thoughtless, tactless words. Yet this was not what made the specter grin so mockingly. Mis' Wilham's tongue, though cutting, was not wilfully malicious or mean; but there were plenty of other tongues which were both. How they would hiss and clack over the fact that Jane had lived for days in the woods with a man! That was a fact which could not be gainsaid, and they would make the most of it. Not even Hard Wood could still them. They would sneer behind his back at the helpless victim. The very ones whose own reputations were far from unsmirched would be worst in their slurs.

He, who had set himself up as judge, had unwittingly condemned her for life. He grated his teeth and writhed.

And now it was afternoon on the third day. And, whether he would or not, he must go outside. His small fuel supply was exhausted, and he must cut more wood. Only a short distance from his portal, he knew, lay a fallen tree, and a few of its branches would suffice for cooking the next two or three meals. The excursion would not take long. Saying nothing, he took his ax and slid out through his hole.

A few minutes of quiet work gave him the limbs he needed. Without taking the time to shorten them, he piled them in his arms and picked his way back among the rocks. At his portal-crevice he laid them down, grasped the top one, and stepped within to lift it to the hole and shove it through. But then, with hands raised and stick resting on the edge of the rock overhead, he halted movement. From inside the dungeon came a voice.

It was her voice. She was talking softly to something—or somebody. What she was saying he could not understand. Very quietly he lowered the stick; stole out and got his ax; shoved it under his belt, returned, and climbed. Reaching the shelf, he crept on hands and knees to the end and peered down. Then he relaxed.

Jane was receiving a visitor. But that visitor was not human. It was a yellowhammer; perhaps the same one which had previously perched above to watch the lone cave-man, perhaps one of its kin. There were several such birds dwelling along here. None of them, however, had ever dared descend into the cavern while he was present. But now that she—the girl to whom the birds came—was alone there, this handsome creature had floated down.

Resting on a stone just beyond her reach, it was bobbing its scarlet-splashed crown to her and murmuring softly, a little too shy to permit her touch, yet eager to be friendly. And she was talking to it, coaxing it, murmuring wordless sounds in response, while she leaned forward with lips parted and hands invitingly open. The watching youth above them felt an unaccountable pang of jealousy.

He moved a little more. This time the caller caught the movement. With a startled note and a quick flirt of wings it whirled away and shot into the trees beyond the cavern. For a couple of seconds Jane sat motionless, a blank expression obliterating her smile. Then she started up.

"Birdie! What's 'come of ye?" she called anxiously. "What scairt ye? Where——"

Then she fell.

She had taken a quick step forward and stumbled. She pitched headlong and struck a rock.

WHETHER Hard jumped the whole distance, or scrambled over and dropped, he never knew. He was lifting her, holding her close, when her lids fluttered open and she stared dazedly at him.

"Lord!" he gasped. "Ye're a-livin'! I was—I was 'fraid ye'd kilt yerself!"

Still she stared. Into her face came a strange, startled look of wonder and joy.

"I can see ye!" she cried. "I can see ye! My eyesight's come——"

She faltered. The joyous look faded. Her expression became strained.

"No—it's a-goin'. Ye're a-fadin' away— Oh, hold on to me—hold tight! Don't go 'way like that— Oh! Ye're gone!"

Frantically she threw her head forward. Her forehead struck against his chest. She threw up one hand to his jaw, drawing back her head again and staring upward with fierce intensity. Then hopeless misery swept over her, and she drooped in his embrace and burst into tears.

"It—it—ain't no use," she sobbed. "It—it never lasts. Oh, God, if I could—only git my sight—an' keep it!"

Dumb, astounded, he looked blankly down at her. She had seen him? She, blind, had actually *seen* him? She said "it" never lasted. It? What? Her sight? Had she ever seen before? What on earth——

"Say!" he broke out. "Wha'd'ye mean? Can ye see things sometimes?"

The fair head against his breast nodded convulsively. She tried to speak, but choked. After a moment she straightened up and sought to draw away from him.

"Crybaby!" she scolded herself, trying to wipe the tears away. "I—it come so sudden I lost my holt. Le' me go. I want to lay down. My—head aches."

"But tell me," he insisted. "I want to know. Can ye really see once in awhile? What do I look like to ye?"

"Ye're black-headed. Black eyes, too. An' there's a—a black smudge onto yer nose. Ye look hard—but ye don't look mean. Oh, le' me lay down! My head's splittin'."

In a daze he led her to her couch. As he did so he ran a finger down his nose. True enough, it brought away a sooty stain. The smear must have come from his cookery at noon—he had not known of it until now—and it was proof positive that she had seen him. When he had set her down he stepped mechanically to the spring, sopped a handkerchief in the cold water, and laid it on her forehead. She was lying supine now, and for a little time she spoke no word.

"That's awful good," she said then, removing the handkerchief. "Will ye wet it some more?" When he had done so, she added: "There's been times—jest a few times—when I could see real plain for a minute. There's been other times when I could tell light from dark—when the sun was shinin'. But it's only once in a long, long time, an' it never lasts. I can remember a little 'bout how things looked 'fore I lost my eyesight, but not much."

"Then ye ain't always been that way? I thought ye was borned so."

"No. When I was a baby I could see like anybody. But—" She hesitated—"wal, I s'pose mebbe I'd better tell ye. 'Twas Jerry that done it. I was 'bout two year old, an' he was 'bout six, an' he got mad an' hit me onto the head with a poker. I guess he 'most kilt me. He did kill my eyesight. I've been this way ever since."

He straightened up with a growl. That damnable Copperhead! If only Hard's last bullet had wounded him mortally! If only he could get his fists on him now! But he'd get that varmint sometime, and when he did he'd get him good!

He muttered something to that effect. Then, to her, he added vaguely:

"Wal, that ain't as bad as if ye'd never been able to see. Mebbe 'twill come back to ye, all of a sudden, an' stay."

"No," she sighed. "I don't b'lieve it. I've been this way 'most sixteen years. There ain't nothin' that can make it better now. I've jest got to stand it."

He stood staring blankly. Something about her words had loosed the spark of an idea which darted through his mind and was gone. What was it? He had not quite grasped it.

His head moved. His gaze focused on the tobacco box in which lay nearly eight hundred dollars, the money which was to build him a new house. Then all at once he staggered as if from a blow. The fleeting spark had been followed by a dazzling flash, a veritable lightning-stroke amid darkness, lighting up a strange, undreamed-of scene.

Like a night-bound traveler suddenly beholding a weirdly radiant country ahead, he gaped at the vision. Then he drew a long breath. Abruptly he burst into a laugh, a joyous, rollicking laugh that reverberated upward and outward beyond the dungeon walls. It ceased as suddenly as it had started. But the light which had leaped into his eyes still shone there as he looked down once more at Jane.

Her lips quivered again, and she threw an arm across her eyes.

"Don't laugh at me!" she choked. "I *can't* stand that!"

"I ain't!" he denied. "I—I jest got my sight, too, Jane. It come to me as sudden as yourn done—an' it ain't leavin' me, neither. I can see somethin' so good that I don't dast tell ye 'bout it yit. I'm only a-hopin' it's true!

"Listen, Jane. I've been mean to ye. I'm 'shamed, like ye said I'd be. An' I ain't goin' to be mean no more. Come mornin', I'm goin' to take ye outen here an' to a better place. It's goin' to be quite a walk——"

"Ye mean to Uncle Eb's?"

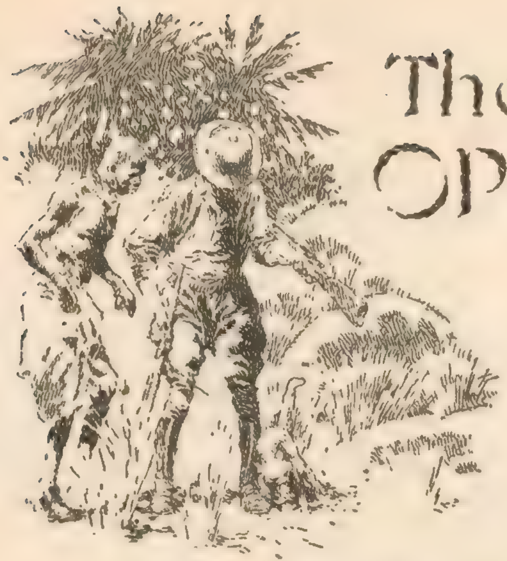
"Nope. Not yit. I—uh—I've got a place into mind that I think will be a hull lot better'n Uncle Eb's. If I find out it ain't, I'll fetch ye to Uncle Eb's then. We've jest got to go an' find out 'bout it. I can't promise ye nothin' jest now—'ceptin' this: I promise ye I ain't tryin' no more tricks onto ye. I give ye my word on to it. Ye'll jest have to trust me—if ye can. I ain't given ye much reason to."

She was silent a moment. Then—

"I guess I can trust ye, Hard."

Again he was amazed by her quiet confidence. He did not know that she had read the honesty of his tone. As he stepped out, however, a smile was on his face, a smile of content and hope. His dungeon was a dungeon no longer. He had found the way out.

TO BE CONCLUDED



The Opportunist

by Leo Walmsley

Author of "Dusty," "Mamba the Terrible," etc.

IT WAS dawn and low water. The outer coral reef had bared, and against the gray of the sea and the wet inward sand flats, it gleamed like the bleached bones of some immense fish the sea had cast up. There was no sun yet. The eastern horizon was packed thick with heavy rain clouds, merging with the sea and seeming part of it.

Back from the line of dejected, wind-bitten coconuts, where the bush began and rolled interminably inland, hung a pale mist, a veil of gauze through which the bushes and the grass and patches of bare, red earth showed with no definite form, but like an old eastern carpet of fantastic design and subtle coloring. A typical dawn of the closing East African dry season—quiet, warm, and with a sullen threat in that eastern cloud bank; the land parched and dying for rain.

Out on the reef a line of wreckage had been strewn by the ebbing tide—spars, planks, the side of a boat, life-buoys, biscuit tins, brooms and strips of canvas. A large gull hovered lazily in the air above, its white plumage showing it up in startling relief against the leaden clouds. Shortly it screamed and came fluttering down to the rock, two yards distant from a wooden grating which had fouled on a knob of coral and lay high and dry above the water's edge.

On that grating was the body of a cat, an ordinary domestic cat, the eyes of it closed, froth and weed on its mouth, the tail not curved but stretched out stiff and straight. Apparently it was dead.

The gull, however, did not venture nearer, but stood where it alighted, gazing without evident interest out to sea. It was a large bird, possessed of a long and capable beak, a beak fundamentally designed for the breaking of clams and similar well-protected shell fish. The upper mandible curved slightly over the extremity of the lower, and was sharp and clawlike and ferocious. The gull was hungry.

TABS, lately ship's cat of the *S. S. Mary Henderson*, originally belonged to London. The circumstances by which she came to join that vessel must be told.

She was born in Bayswater in one of those gloomy Victorian mansions that form, as it were, a bulwark between the ultra-respectability of Hyde Park and the grim poverty of Padington; her female parent, a dignified and well-bred tabby; her father—but perhaps it is kinder to refer to him simply as a male, a male cat of Bayswater.

There were four other kittens born at the same time. Tabs owed her survival to the chance that she was born first and mewed loudest when the unwanted family was placed in a basket by the kitchen maid to be taken to the local chemist's, and the cat Nirvana. The maid, who was sentimental, lived at Rotherhite, S.E. She was keeping company with the engine room steward of the *Mary Henderson;* the *Mary Henderson* had more than her fair share of rats. Tabby embarked.

The actual details of the disaster that sent the *Mary Henderson* to the bottom are immaterial to this story. Enough that she was carrying coal, that the coal caught fire and ultimately exploded. Five minutes before the climax came, Tabs, nauseated by the smoke, had gone up to the forecastle deck where there was wind and untainted air. That part of the ship, unlike the middle and after-part, was not rent in pieces.

Following the great white flash that clove the ship's centre like a blade of incandescent steel, the deck lifted until its fore-end was pulled up by the cable chains, when it slid over the starboard side and sank, dragging the chains and the chain locker, the stern and all that was forward of No. 1 derrick into the smooth black sea. The cat was thrown clear of all this debris. She swam round and round until her nose struck the grating; she climbed on to it and remained still.

Throughout she was guided by one fierce, dominating instinct—self-preservation. She was not aware of what had happened to her human shipmates. She felt at first an intense desire for their companionship, but she heard no voices, no sounds whatever but the soft *lap-lap* of the water round the grating and an occasional thud as other flotsam met and hung together for a while.

She had no conscious appreciation of catastrophe, or of present or future danger. Her actions and reactions were beyond control, which shows how a lower animal like a cat scores over us humans with our doubts and fears and hopes, our visions and dreams.

Instinct, not fear, made her hold to that frail raft when a shark's fin split the water not a foot from the edge of it. Instinct, not conscious hope, made her hold to it all night long while slowly the coast current and the monsoon wind drove it in towards the shore. And it was instinct that opened her eyes and sent an impulse like an electric shock through her exhausted, cold-numbed body that very second when the gull, confident that at last all was well, waddled close up, and prepared for a vicious jab at its fortuitously-sent breakfast.

Creatures of the wild rarely suffer surprize. Their sense of caution is too acute. But the gull received such a shock that it seemed momentarily to lose the use of its wings; for even as Tabs opened her eyes and saw that beak descending, her body arched, her muscles contracted, and loosed simultaneously in a clawing spring, that shot her up from the grating straight into the front of her enemy.

The bird had no chance to avoid that incredible attack. Its wings, as I have said, seemed paralyzed. With teeth and claws Tabs fought it, until the air was a storm of feathers, and blood was staining the rock. And then the bird remembered, and with two swift and heavy beats it rose into the air and cleared, went beating up with its feathers still falling in gay little eddies until at last it was a grey speck against the grey sky, and Tabs below was invisible.

But the cat by that time had lost interest in her late enemy. The excitement of battle past, a lassitude crept over her. The fire died out of her eyes, she lay down on the rock again—but not for long. The reef was exposed. There would be other gulls. The tide too was on the turn. Instinct demanded a new and greater effort. She was sick, poisoned with sea water. Her throat and tongue were swollen and raw. She must drink, find fresh water or die, and only the land could give her that.

Behind her the sea reached a flat and desert plain to the horizon; in front, beyond the mangroves and the low coral cliff was the bush—and Africa.

Instinct? What mattered that she was just an ordinary town-bred cat, unused to the ways of the wild, unused even to the ways of a safe English countryside? What mattered that her ancestors for generations past had been bred entirely for the service of man? Her instinct was unspoiled. In that very fight she had gone back a thousand years, gone back to the wild where her untamed ancestors had hunted, fought beneath the stars, drunk at the forest pools, slept in the branches of high trees and unscalable rocks.

Two nights before she had lapped a saucer of condensed milk, and rubbed her back in sensuous delight against the engine room steward's greasy trousers. This morning she had fought for her life, and there was blood on her lips instead of milk, warm blood that she could taste even through the bitter sea salt that encrusted her hot, swollen tongue.

Was it that taste that charged her necessary effort, brought back the light to her eyes? The reef ran out a hundred yards from the beach. Tabs glanced across the dividing sand with its shallow weedy pools and mangrove thickets, and then with little outward sign of the exhaustion she was fighting, set off at a quick run, leaping the pools, and adopting a slightly zigzag route such as any small mammal will do when it finds itself in an exposed and dangerous place.

The cliff was low. She took it at a flying leap, and found herself panting at the top, at the roots of a great coconut palm, whose trunk bent out as though in abject recognition of inferiority towards the sea. She paused and sniffed the air. It contained no scent of fresh water.

For the first time she seemed assailed by a definite fear, and mewed piteously, like a kitten wanting its mother. She ran forward a hundred yards or so and sniffed again. She turned through the palms towards the edge of the bush, found a sedgy hollow, and started to scratch. But she did not find water. There had been no rain on the coast for many months. There are no rivers thereabouts, no permanent pools. Slowly now she walked back to the cliff edge and then, with a suddenness which showed what a struggle of will over body her fight and her run had been, she collapsed. Her head dropped, her muscles went flabby, and her breathing died down until you would not have noticed the faintest heaving of her flanks.

A fly alighted on her little hot muzzle. Others chased lightly about her lips. From a hole in the sandy earth, a few yards away, a frightful land-crab thrust its great claws, and its stalk eyes were like a pair of pericopes, eagerly observant. But that crab was a degree more cautious than the gull had been. It just remained there, biding its time, a wonderful little specialist in the diagnosis of death.

And while it waited, the cloud bank in the east swelled up like a great mass of leavened dough and spread itself out and went darker and darker until at last the whole sky was a dome of lead. The air became hot. The wind died away to a complete and awful calm. And then the storm broke, the first storm of the rainy season—lightning, thunder, a sudden squall that ripped liquid ivory from the grey sea and set the palm trees swaying to their roots. And then a roar—a roar that was not thunder or wind or surf, the roar of tropical rain. It came from the east across the sea, rain such as you will never see at home, rain that is itself an almost solid wall only that it pours and pours.

And Tabs, who had remained inert while the thunder crashed and echoed and the wind sent leaves and husks tumbling upon her from the palm tops, awakened to that roar, awakened as though it were the very voice of Nature speaking to her, bidding her live. She got up on to her haunches, her blistered tongue protruding from her mouth; she glanced upwards, and as she did so the rain fell upon her, cold, drenching and vital. The crab folded his stalk eyes flat to his side and disappeared.

II

ONE of the rarest sights in the wild—and in that term is comprised jungle, sea or arctic ice floes—is a weak or wounded animal. Either a creature is fit or it dies; and that Tabs survived an hour of unconsciousness on the coral reef and another hour beneath the palms, is no disproof of this law, but serves to show how Nature and Chance occasionally work hand in hand.

But Chance having brought that rainstorm and awakened the castaway from a state of body not far removed from death, handed back her destiny to instinct. She drank, not greedily, but with a nice care for her condition, and then sought the protection of an upturned palm root, for she did not like rain. There she licked the last traces of the voyage from her fur, and discovered shortly that she was very hungry—hunger being the second of primitive desires. She waited, however, until the storm was over. Then very cautiously she stole out from the sheltering root and made her way towards the sedgy hollow, now a pool.

Seeing her walk so carefully through the sparse grass you would not have guessed that she belonged to a civilized world, that there was in her any experience other than what had been jungle-learned. Her colouring was neutral, of the grey and black barred order which blended marvelously with the ground and vegetation. She was lean, too, and carried not an ounce of superfluous flesh.

She did not go right up to the pool, but halted by a patch of grass and reconnoitered. The air contained a multitude and a confusion of scents, most of them, however, emanating from the beach and therefore salty and undesirable. She wanted clean meat, something that belonged essentially to the dry land.

Nothing, however, came near the pool and by-and-by she left the grass and just as carefully made her way to the edge of a narrow strip of sandy turf between the palm and the beginning of the thorn, when she suddenly flopped down on her belly, her head reaching out eagerly, her tail twitching with excitement; for scarcely a stone's throw away was a turtle dove, foraging for grubs among the grass.

And now began a game in which even your most domesticated cat is well practised, a game of patient waiting, but a game in which victory does not necessarily come to the one who waits. Apart from her twitching tail, which she could no more control than the pumping of her heart, Tabs remained dead still. The dove might come her way; again, it might not. If it did, then most assuredly it would die and Tabs would have her meal. If it did not, other food must be sought.

For a while the dove seemed interested exclusively in a particular clump of grass; then it did start to waddle in her direction, stopping to scratch occasionally, but not once with apparent success. At a range of four yards, however, it found a hoard of spider's eggs, lying like tiny potatoes among the sand, and it turned round so that its head was hidden. Very, very carefully the cat rose up then, not to its full height, but just enough to clear its belly from the ground—took a step forward, and crouched for a running spring.

But it did not make that spring, for the bird, without any apparent reason, flew lazily up, turned in the air and came down to earth again a hundred yards away.

And that, one might have thought, was the end of the game. But Tabs, whose eyesight was marvelously keen, noted something very peculiar about the dove's alighting, something not quite natural. It did not immediately begin to forage again. Instead, it beat its wings as though trying to fly up. And Tabs decided the phenomenon was worth investigation.

Keeping to the bush margin of the sandy strip, she moved quickly round until at last not a dozen yards separated her from the dove. Then she paused again, mystified. The bird was beating its wings more frantically than ever. Yet it had not moved an inch. Its feet were hidden in the grass. Apparently they were held, as though by bird lime or a noose.

Tabs glared fixedly upon her hoped-for quarry, but it was not in her philosophy to ponder long over the manners of this strange land. There, almost within springing distance now, was a meal for which her whole being ached. Her mouth dribbled. There came to her throat a curious rumbling sound, half growl, half purr. And then she went forward, and had sprung and got her claws upon the bird before she discovered what it was that held it—the big claw of a land-crab, three times as big as that hideous one which, unknown to her, had watched and watched while she lay unconscious.

Its shell was wedged firmly in the entrance to its hole. It had waited hours probably, with one claw cunningly hid among the grass for such a chance as the dove had given it. And now its victim, almost weakened and nearing that state when it might be conveniently dealt with, the crab was in no humor to give it up so readily.

Its claw was locked high on the dove's leg; Tabs had a more business-like hold, one that mercifully brought about the poor bird's almost instant death, but transformed its body into a rope for an extraordinary tug-of-war. The crab was powerful. For that matter, so was Tabs. But whereas the crab had no other wish than to drag its victim into the entrance of its lair, Tabs even in the heat of desire, realized the dangers of the open, realized that she must make for the shelter of the bush before daring to eat one scrap of meat.

She did not see the eagle, however. That very cunning bird hovered in a direct line between the combatants and the now unclouded sun; and from where they struggled was invisible. Tabs, swearing furiously, had her hind claws dug into the grass roots, her fore claws and mouth on the bird, and she pulled like that with all her might, while the crab held on.

But the crab belonged to the country. Its eyes, too, possessed that valuable faculty of sight in all directions. When the eagle swept down, it saw, and it knew the eagle of old, for it was a fish eagle whose dietary is a very comprehensive one, ranging from tunny fry and shrimps and land-crabs to gulls, and even to the small antelope of the coast jungle. And the crab unlocked its claw, instantly, so that Tabs, the strain suddenly relaxed, sprang back and went head over heels with the dove still held between her paws and mouth.

In a second she was up again. In the same second she saw the eagle, with upraised wings and outstretched talons, sinking down upon her. And in that same second, so swift does instinct work, she assessed the true value of her adversary, dropped the dead dove, took a marvellous sideways leap, and without pausing to reckon the success of her manoeuvres, shot out across the grass for the sheltering bush. She reached it. She did not stop. She found a little path which meandered inland and, belonging to some small and careful mammal, had always ample shelter overhead. She followed it for a mile. She was still running when she came upon the maker of the path and a couple of its family.

She had never seen a mongoos before. Neither had the little mongooses encountered a cat of her description. Yet there was no need for introduction. Just as quickly as Tabs had sized up the eagle and realized that her meal was lost, the mother mongoos sized up Tabs and resigned herself to the compulsory bereavement. It was the smallest and weakest of her young that died. She and the stronger one escaped, which by the law of the jungle is right; and by the same law Tabs surely deserved some sort of reward. The mongoos was small, scarce bigger than a mouse, and compared with the dove from which she had been so rudely balked, it was a meagre thing to stave a hunger such as hers.

It served, however. She mouthed it, and went along the path until she found a convenient bush with clear approaches. And then she settled down to her first jungle meal.

III

OF THE three creatures which man has taken from the wild to be his companions, the one that has changed its character least in the march of evolution surely is the cat. None but the cat could have been cast away on that desert African coast, and without any previous experience of the wild, survived. A horse, more directly dependent upon man even than a dog, would have died directly. A dog might have survived the actual conditions of life, yet would have died of a broken heart had it not found human company within a reasonable time.

But Tabs, the way that she took to the jungle life, might never have rubbed her flanks against the limbs of man, might never have eaten food not of her own killing. Physically and mentally the wild absorbed her, not because she desired it, however, but because of her perfect adaptability, because the cat is first and last an opportunist.

She did not, during the first few weeks, require the shelter or the service of a human home; therefore she did not think of it or long for it. A humanly uninhabited jungle was all sufficient for her needs. There was water now that the rains had broken; there was food. The sun's heat was not unduly trying, there was shelter from the rain and from her multitudinous enemies. It was amazing, nevertheless, how quickly she learned the ways of the wild, of the creatures which she hunted, the creatures which hunted her.

Chiefly she lived on small birds, shrews and mice, but occasionally she killed rats and mongooses and other fair sized mammals. During the first month she did not go far from the coast belt. Sometimes she went down to the reef and caught small rock fishes, trapped in the pools by the ebbing tide. She had no fear of gulls. She kept up a perpetual lookout for hawks and eagles, however.

Against jackals, too, she was perpetually on her guard, and she was too wise ever to climb a tree if one found her trail, for the brute would have remained below until she died of starvation. There was not a day that she did not bring some new creature into her ken, yet never was she surprised. If it was smaller than herself, and seemingly undangerous, she attacked; if larger and dangerous, she left well enough alone.

It would be absurd, however, to imagine that Tabs was so efficient in her hunting and her jungle lore as to creature actually born in the wild. Food on the coast was abundant; unduly so. There were far too many birds and small mammals, and as nature never permits an unbalanced population, more jackals, servals and eagles began to appear, so that Tabs at last was faced by a double danger, scarcity of food and an unreasonable increase of her foes.

It was a night when she had been chased by a whole pack of jackals—and she had eaten nothing for many hours—that she got her first vague longing for the old civilized scheme of things, for milk and scraps and the sensuous comfort of a fireside. A vague, subconscious longing. But her instinct was just as alert as before. She knew the time had come for her to leave the coast and find a new hunting ground.

She set off inland therefore, and travelled almost continually for three days. Whether that vague longing had anything at all to do with the direction she took it, is impossible to say. Most likely it was pure coincidence that led her to the deserted Arab village. It was a drear, monotonous country, containing little game apart from birds, guinea-fowl and partridges and wild duck, all difficult to hunt. At any time but the rains there would be no water at all save near the village itself.

The nearest permanent river, the Natandu, lay a hundred miles north. Because of this absence of big game she did not encounter lions or any of the larger cats, although she did see a small herd of elephants, bathing in the same swamp that provided her, after a distressingly wet hunt, with a tender duckling. But she did not give them a second glance. They were not dangerous.

The village had not long been deserted. Plague had broken out there a few months before. The surviving inhabitants, believing the place accursed, had fled to the hills. Yet the scent of humans was strong enough to reach Tabs when she was still a mile down-wind, and caused an extraordinary thrill to pass through her. Curiously it frightened her. But she quickly overcame her fear. It was daytime and she carried straight on until the bush gave way to overgrown fields, and finally to a clearing with a dozen tumbled-down mud huts at its farther edge and a well-built Arab house in its centre.

A flock of dejected-looking vultures were perched on the house roof. The door, richly carved in the manner of the coast Arabs, was ajar.

By that time the cat knew that the human scent was stale, that the place was uninhabited. She could not, however, conquer her all-powerful desire to investigate. The vultures were harmless. She made sure that there were no hawks hovering in the air above, however, and then she made a swift rush across the clearing to the door. She went right in, and found herself in a shady courtyard. She mewed plaintively, and looked about her. There was not the slightest sign of habitation, only that stale scent, pervading everything and rousing her vague longing for human companionship to a pitifully vain desire.

On the ground floor giving on the courtyard were rooms that had been used as stores. Above, reached by a stone staircase, were the deserted living rooms of the Arab trader to whom the place belonged. Tabs explored them, mewing all the time. Then she came down, and lay in the shade. When she was there she watched a large cockroach come from a crack in the wall and scurry out into the open.

Suddenly an insect about the size of a bumble bee but colored bright green, shot down like an emerald through a shaft of sunshine, and alighting alongside the cockroach, turned, and as a terrier tackles a rabbit, leapt for the cockroach's neck, bit deep in and worried. It fell back. The cockroach started for its lair, running less quickly, however. Again the cockroach-wasp attacked. The cockroach staggered, but shook its enemy off. Once more it returned. This time the cockroach was thrown completely over on to its back and the wasp, with leisurely deliberation, bit deep in until the other became quite still. It began to drag the body away into the shadows of the store room, where shortly it would serve as an incubator and a food store for the wasp's eggs and grubs.

Tabs watched the enacting of this little tragedy with a calm detachment. It did not concern her. It belonged to the wild, and for the time being she was not of the wild. She wanted to hear the sound of human voices; she wanted man-given food; she did not want to hunt, she did not want to fight or participate any more in that fierce, unresting conflict, that eternal pitting of strength against strength, cunning against cunning, which is the jungle life.

Yet her mood was a passing one. Later, when the sun went down and she was hungry and a rat scurried across the courtyard, she became once more the Tabs of the coast plains. She killed the rat and ate it. She went into the bush to drink. She found a trail, and without another thought of the house and its scent of mankind, struck out along it and traveled throughout the night. Next day, however, she killed nothing but a tiny finch. The vague longing returned to her. The next day she killed nothing at all. The longing for mankind rose to fever heat, and that night she turned back towards the village.

She did not go far, however. She was in an area of fairly thin bush when she got the trail of a guinea-fowl chick and traced it into a patch of rank elephant grass. It was rarely she was successful with guinea-fowls; her tactics were unusually stealthy. For nearly a dozen yards she literally squirmed over the ground; then pausing, she suddenly heard a noise that made her heart throb.

It came from beyond the elephant grass—a peculiar cry, half growl, half hiss. Utterly forgetful of the chick, of her raging hunger, Tabs remained death-still while it came again. This time she answered, not with a mew but with that melancholy howl which is familiar to all human watchers of city nights. What she meant by it I cannot tell. It may have been encouragement; it may have been a warning. Probably it conveyed a little of both, for the acknowledgement came from nearer at hand, and it had a wavering quality in it eloquent of misgiving.

Tabs did not move her position. She was trembling now in every limb; her eyes glowed red and lustrous. Suddenly the grass before her shook. She did start back then, but she did not take her eyes from the grass where now emerged a male wild cat, two inches taller than herself, a little longer, yet a degree more slender; fur of an almost similar shade and markings, and the rest of him an almost perfect edition of herself—youthful, graceful, sensuously feline. He carried in his mouth the guinea-fowl chick.

It was dark, of course, unusually dark, for the sky was overcast and there was no moon or starshine. But these two required no light to be known to one another. They knew already. Gone from the mind of Tabs were those vain longings for mankind; gone, all gone, her fears of starvation. She had found a mate. No longer need she hunt alone. Sublime opportunist, she had found the solution of her problem. As for the male wildcat, he knew that he had come to the fulfillment of a journey. He advanced slowly, halting at last when his muzzle was not a yard from her. He growled.

She growled back, and when they moved again there was no hesitancy. Tabs calmly took the chick from the other's mouth and began to eat. The male apparently did not expect a share, for he turned about and disappeared in the grass. A short interval, and there came from the forest some yards away a nervous cackling, a whirring of wings, and then a silence as he came back, this time with a full grown guinea-fowl dragging on the ground between his forelegs.

He deposited it in front of her. She left her chick. They fell on the larger quarry, tearing its feathers away, biting out the breast muscles, quietly growling the while. And when they had eaten their fill, the male cat stretched himself, licked his lips and hers and set out along the path for the nearest water hole. Tabs, purring contentedly, followed on behind.

IV

THEY made their lair among some boulders at the crest of a bushy ridge which gave them a fine view of the surrounding country and yet was not unduly conspicuous.

Here, just before the end of the rains, Tabs had her kittens, four in all, but one was dead within an hour of birth. On the other three she lavished a fierce, maternal love. For the first week she never left them for an instant, and never once allowed her mate to rest from his hunting. It was a gruelling time for him, for game was scarce. Her appetite while she nursed the kittens was insatiable, yet even had she been free to rove from the lair she would have been little good on the trail; for just a week before the kittens were born she had been bitten in her foreleg by a mongoos she had captured. An important ligature had been severed, rendering that paw helpless.

Had Tabs been capable of deep reasoning, she would have known that it was to her kittens she owed her life. There is no sentiment in a jungle mating. The male would have left her instantly had it not been for the expected young. She might have reasoned too that when her kittens were old enough to fend for themselves, he would desert her and she would be left alone to hunt and protect herself with only three whole limbs, in a country vastly different from the coast belt with its teeming life.

But all her instincts now were centred in those three kittens of hers. She did not reason, she had no memory of the past, no vision of the future. Her young and her still faithful mate were all sufficient for her needs. Yet after all Tabs was not of the African wild. She had survived, it was true, made good there where even a jungle-born creature might have died; but there was lacking in her blood something that can only come from generations of African bred cats—hereditary immunity to the special diseases which levy such toll upon the young.

There was nothing at first in those kittens to suggest the absence of that vital quality. For a week they throve. Then one grew sick, refused the breast, and died. Another followed; and when the third opened its eyes and first looked out upon the world it was with a weakly glance. Frantic with grief, Tabs licked it, and fed it, cuddled it close to her warm body, and did everything she could to keep alive the faintly burning spark of life. In vain. The male cat, returning from an unsuccessful hunt late one afternoon, found Tabs licking the dead body of the last of his family. He went up to her. She snarled at him. He drove her back and licked the dead kitten himself. Then he turned and walked to the edge of the rock which formed a platform to their lair, sniffed the air suspiciously, and at last leapt down.

At that same moment Captain Harry Debenham, on a three days' hunting trip from H.M. Survey Ship *Cairo*, taking in stores at Kilwa Kissovami, set out to climb to the crest of the ridge in the hope of spotting a herd of elephants he had been following since dawn. He was accompanied by a native hunter, moving slightly in advance and carrying a shotgun. A wind was blowing down the ridge. Possibly the male cat otherwise would not have taken the route it did. It leapt from the edge of the rock to another boulder, from that to a third, from that to instant death.

It was the native who fired the shot.

The captain, still slightly behind, swore; swore louder still when he discovered what his man had killed, for a white man does not shoot animals unnecessarily.

But the native did not understand, for was not his code of life near to that of the cat he had slain? He held up the poor dead creature.

"*Mazuri, mazuri, bwana*—I shall skin it. Watch out, it may have a mate and young."

He pointed up the kopje; the white man, still swearing beneath his breath, looked as Tabs leapt lightly down from her ledge and without hesitation came toward him. The native dropped the cat and raised his gun. The white man snatched it from him. Tabs advanced until she was in touching distance of her dead mate.

Debenham gave a gasp of amazement.

"That's not a wild cat. It's—I'll swear it's tame."

Tabs halted and sniffed the carcass. She suddenly started back and bared her teeth in a wicked snarl. And then she heard a voice, a voice calling her back from the dim ages, across all those countless years wherein she had lived the jungle life, and hunted beneath the stars, drunk at its forest pools, found a forest lover.

"Puss—puss!"

The snarl went. A wonder came in her eyes.

"Puss! By Jove! It is, I'll swear it. Puss!"

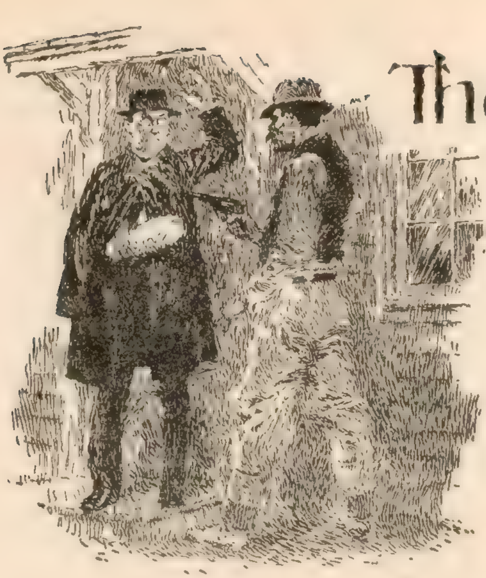
She came across to where the Englishman stood. She rubbed her flanks against his leg; and then she purred.

TABS, having drunk condensed milk from a saucer which bore in monogram the initials of His Majesty the King, stretched herself out on the thick pile carpet of the *Cairo's* wardroom and composed herself to slumber.

The ship had just cleared port, tiffin was being served, Captain Debenham was talking.

"Can't be certain, of course, but we'll find out at Zanzibar. I'll blue a cable on it. I remember the incident distinctly. It was their engine room steward, a weazly young cockney, half dead when they picked him up; his hair all singed off, every blessed rib curved in. Kept babbling about his cat. Said it was a lucky mascot, or something, given him by his girl. They're bound to know his address at Zanzibar. I'll cable for his description. Some cat. Look at her. Hardly think she was mated to a real wild tom? Seemed to cut her up no end at first, then be hanged if she didn't come and rub herself against my leg. Rum things, cats."

And Tabs, the opportunist, slept on.



The CUNNING of the SERPENT

by Henry S. Whitehead

Author of "The Intarsia Box."

THE mail came into Carnation twice a week, on Tuesdays and Fridays. It was brought over from Red Hills, the nearest railroad station twelve miles across the desert, by Joe Sowers, a superannuated cowman. Sowers made the trip to Jim Peterson the postmaster, keeper of Carnation's chief emporium of general trade. Therefore, even when he was at home in his rare intervals of rest from the constant visitations throughout his enormous district, the Bishop of the Niobraras had two heavy days of "inside work," since his mail receipts were larger than those of any other citizen of Carnation.

The bishop's mail had another distinction. It contained the only regular pay-check that came into the little frontier town which was the geographical center of his work. This was because, being a missionary bishop, he received his salary from the missionary headquarters in New York once a month. As Jim Peterson was also the banker, the bishop had fallen into the habit of taking his check to the storekeeper as soon as he got it, and having it cashed.

This unusual method of receiving one's income had excited much local comment, and it was well known that Bishop Kent always carried his check to Peterson's and came out with a roll of two hundred and fifty dollars, once every month.

This sum was far more than the bishop needed for his simple requirements, but it made it possible for him to perform a good many kindly acts with his right hand of which his left hand knew nothing. The recipients could be counted on to say nothing.

But the case of Rosie, Rosie of the Gopher Hole's Bevy of Blossoms, had leaked out some time after Rosie's unexpected departure for the East. It had leaked out through the ugly mouth of Clark Shadwell. In a moment of very bad judgment, complicated by a certain amount of the Gopher Hole's very bad red liquor, poor Rosie had succumbed to the allurements Shadwell had been holding out to her, and had abandoned the frying-pan of the Gopher Hole's precarious housing for the fire of Clark Shadwell's tumbledown shack on the edge of town.

Rosie had never ceased to regret this step. But regrets did her no good. Like everybody else in or near Carnation she soon came to know Shadwell for what he was, a truculent, transplanted hill-billy from the Tennessee mountains, a gun-fighter, who, weaned on corn-licker and fed on rattail tobacco since before he had teeth, had found the scope of his native land too narrow for his expansive nature. He had come out into the Bad Lands where he would have room to swing a gat, and had picked on Carnation as his habitat. He had made it clear to Rosie that if she ever left him to go back to the Gopher Hole he would get her. This threat had held her through every variety of ill treatment the "pizenest" citizen of Carnation could think up.

One Monday night the bishop had arrived home from a long visitation, and after his usual process of cleaning-up after three weeks away from his famous bath tub, in the alkali-dust, had stepped over to Peterson's for his accumulated mail. There was such a huge stack of it that he had not waited even to cash his check but, intending to do so the next morning, had carried it all home with him.

He was in the midst of this large batch of mail the next morning when a tap on the door interrupted him. He opened the door and Rosie stumbled in. She was weak and sick and half starved, and she was suffering acutely from the effects of the beating Shadwell had administered the night before.

Nobody except the bishop and Rosie, and the Personage up above Who was the bishop's boss, knew what the two said to each other, but about an hour later they came out of the bishop's little house and walked together along Carnation's main street of shacks to Peterson's store. Old Joe Sowers was outside beside his dilapidated buckboard with its pair of rangy cow ponies, and the bishop paused to speak to him.

"Kindly defer your leaving for a few minutes, Mr. Sowers. There will be a passenger going with you to Red Hills."

Old Joe nodded his dusty old head and spat reflectively in the thick dust of the roadway, saying nothing.

The bishop accompanied Rosie into the store, cashed his check and, while the store loafers stood agape, counted out into Rosie's hand ten ten-dollar bills. The loafers followed the oddly assorted pair out in front of the store, and saw the bishop deferentially hand Rosie into the buckboard.

"Take this young lady to the station at Red Hills, if you please," came the bishop's precise voice speaking to old Joe. "Perhaps, too, you will be kind enough to see that she gets her ticket through to New York, and is placed safely on the train."

"Uh-huh," responded old Joe, shifting his quid nervously from one side of his leathern jaws to the other.

The girl looked unutterable things at the little bishop who, removing his hat, bowed to her stiffly, and the buckboard started off at a great rate.

Gravely saluting the men about the store doorway, the bishop turned on his heel, and with a measured tread which he never varied, about twenty-one inches to the step, Reddy Larimore had once reported, walked gravely back to his little adobe house by the creek side.

Ed Hammond, proprietor of the Red Horse Restaurant and Bar, having learned what was in the wind, overtook the little man before he had reached his house. Hammond laid a huge, protective hand on the neat shoulder of the bishop's neatly pressed black coat.

"Land sake, Bishop, y'aint mixin' in on this yere Clark Shadwell's deals, are ye? Goshamighty, man, that cattymount ain't got no respec' fer nothin' ner nobody. They tells me ye're a-helpin' this yere gal o' his'n to get away east. Why, man, he'll jes' plum ruin ye with lead bullets fer that, soon's he knows what ye've ben up to. It's a wonder he haint a-rearin' roun' right now. Why—likely's not he'll be ridin' after 'em an' kill the gal an' old Joe to boot. Hain't ye got no sense?"

The bishop turned on Hammond a cool, level eye.

"Its very good of you, Mr. Hammond, to warn me like this. I appreciate it highly, sir. But there is no immediate likelihood of his doing anything I am informed by this unfortunate young woman that he is at the present time, drunk, sir, dead drunk in fact.

"She will be aboard the noon train long before he awakens. I have no doubts about her safety. You may be interested to know that I have given her letters to people in New York who will see to her welfare."

"Yeah—but!" Hammond choked at the little man's simplicity. "Look yere, Bishop; I wasn't thinkin' so much about her; only kinda incidental-like. Hits mos'ly you I'm a-thinkin' about. You've gotta live right yere, ain't ye? Well, then, all's I gotta say is, gosh sake, heel yo'self. Kin you do anythin' tall with a gun? I s'pose not. Good land amighty! Hev ye stopped to think what that —— roarin' son of a gun'll do to you?"

The bishop looked pleasantly up at his big friend who loaned him his dance-hall and bar to conduct services in whenever he spent a Sunday in Carnation. He smiled like a child.

"As I said before, it is extremely kind of you to take this interest, Mr. Hammond. I may tell you that I am not unmindful of my own personal safety. Perhaps you did not know that before I entered the ministry I studied law."

Hammond interrupted. He spoke as a person speaks to a lovable but very inexperienced child.

"Lord love ye, Bishop! This yere aint no question of law. Don't you see? You're dealin'-in with a sharp an' a bad egg. What's this yere Shadwell care 'bout law Good land!"

Ed Hammond threw up his hands in a hopeless gesture. The bishop was incapable of understanding the situation.

The bishop merely continued to smile like a child.

"You misapprehend me, I am afraid, Mr. Hammond. What I meant to convey was only this: That in my study of the law I was frequently confronted with the maxim, 'Never cross a bridge until you come to it!' You see, while I am very grateful to you for your thought of me, yet, after all, we are anticipating, are we not? I fear you are crossing a bridge before arriving at it, Mr. Hammond. Just now Shadwell is in no condition to do anything. He may even remain unaware of what has become of this unfortunate young woman. He is not very popular, is he? There is no occasion for anybody to tell him of my small part in the matter, is there?"

Hammond took his departure abruptly at this point in the conversation. He could not trust himself to speak again without profanity, so strong were his feelings at this moment. He did not wish to use profanity in the bishop's presence.

The bishop continued placidly, twenty-one inches to the step, toward his little house, his mind on his unfinished letters.

Hammond proceeded straight back to Peterson's store, gathered the loafers together, and discharged his mind.

"An' if any of yo' shoats," he ended, "opens yo' traps about it, the old man's cooked, I'm a-tellin' ye; an' if that heppens, by the goshamighty, they'll be two more folks full of lead in this yere meetropolis, the same bein' that there skunk Shadwell an' the saphead that spills a word to him!"

Peterson promised to see to it that old Joe kept his mouth tight shut.

CLARK SHADWELL'S first inquiry took place late that night. He was cold sober when he walked into the Gopher Hole, and he said little. Reluctantly convinced that nobody there knew anything about the subject of his inquiry, he was nonplussed. Shadwell's imagination did not reach the possibility of any one's shipping his light o' love out of town. If she hadn't gone back to her old life at the Gopher Hole she must necessarily be in some other man's house, or dead. As the days succeeded one another, and no evidence of Rosie's being above ground in Carnation, the conviction grew upon him that she must have met accidental death in some form; or, possibly—well, she had more than once hinted at doing away with herself.

The bishop was away from Carnation for several weeks at one stretch, during the rest of the month, and when he returned Shadwell had made up his mind that if he had lost Rosie, at least no other man was hiding her out.

On a certain Tuesday afternoon the bishop and several other persons were in Peterson's store waiting for the contents of old Joe's mail bags to be sorted and distributed. The bishop received his letters and opened the first two or three that came to hand while talking to some of his acquaintances. He glanced through the contents and dropped the envelopes into the waste-box which stood near the central stove.

As soon as he was gone, Clark Shadwell who was present poked at the trash in the waste-box. Then, stooping, he picked out a stamped envelope which had caught his eye. It was the kind of envelope already stamped, and with three dotted lines in the upper left-hand corner, along with the words: "If not delivered in —— days, return to ——"

In these blank spaces were written a New York address, and the name, Rose Hollister.

Shadwell spelled this out carefully, then, quickly crumpling the envelope, he dropped it back in the waste-box and, without a word to anybody, walked out of the store and, unhitching his cayuse, loped off in the direction of his shack at the town's edge.

As soon as he was gone, Ed Hammond picked out the crumpled ball and, straightening it out read what Shadwell had read.

Then, with a suppressed oath, he started for the bishop's house.

The bishop, urbane as always, listened to his fervid second warning.

Clark Shadwell knew! By Rose Hollister's foolishness, and the bishop's innocence, there was no further concealment possible, and, as Ed graphically imparted it, —— was about to bust loose.

Was the bishop heeled?

"Goshamighty! Here! Take this! Pack it constant, too! Goshamighty!"

Hammond left, too full of wrath and concern for the bishop's safety to trust himself for further utterance, and the bishop picked up gingerly, and examined curiously, the small, compact, double-barreled derringer he had left on the table.

That evening Doc Ellis had a hurry call to the bishop's house, and the next day the Carnation *Tocsin and Range Bulletin* carried a circumstantial account of how the chief ecclesiastic of the territory had slipped and fallen on the floor of his famous bathroom, the bathroom his predecessor had installed, with a patent ram which pumped water from the creek, and a straining apparatus which removed part of the alkali mud from the water, and broken his right arm. The paper referred to this injury as a compound fracture, this descriptive item being furnished by Carnation's leading scientist, Doc Ellis.

The next day the bishop with his right arm in elaborate splints and a sling concocted of many rolls of bandage, went uncomplainingly about his affairs, and to all inquiries responded with the cheerful statement that his injury was nothing—

"Just nothing at all, thank you."

How he managed for the subsequent days to dress would have puzzled Carnation if Carnation had been critical of such matters. But Carnation wasn't critical and, as Ed Hammond pointed out scornfully to one curious customer of his at the Red Horse—

"That there old bishop don't have to tie no necktie like other Easterners, 'cause he wears one of them purple dickies."

To Hammond's importunities to watch his step, the bishop always returned assurances of his complete immunity from danger, and cited the fact that Shadwell had made no hostile move whatever against him. All Shadwell knew from having read Rosie's envelope was that Rosie had got away to New York and had written to him. There was no necessary connection between those facts and his complicity in her escape.

On Friday of that same week, the bishop received his mail as usual and carried it home with him. Later in the evening he returned to Peterson's store to cash his check. Shadwell and several others were at the store. Peterson handed the bishop his bills, and the bishop placed them with his free left hand in the left-hand pocket of his neatly pressed black trousers, and took his departure after greeting pleasantly everybody in the store.

Shadwell left within a minute afterward, and as there was no one present who could guess that anything was in the wind except Peterson himself, his exit excited no comment whatever. Peterson, greatly worried, and unable to leave because he was alone in the store, sent a boy for Hammond.

Hammond arrived in a minute or two, and Peterson whispered to him that Shadwell had trailed the bishop out.

Hammond sprang out of the door and hurried down the street toward the bishop's house. Past the lighted section of the main street he hastened and broke into a run as soon as he had left this behind him. As he ran he slid his holster around on his belt, and loosened its flap.

The bishop was out of sight, and there was no trace of Shadwell, but Ed had noticed his cayuse still tied to the rail in front of Peterson's when he rushed out, and knew that Shadwell must be afoot, and not far away.

He found the bishop's house in darkness, as he slowed his pace on arriving before it, and looked, with a worried expression, at the unlighted windows. He came nearer, walking stealthily now, his hand on the butt of his forty-five. He started to walk around the house, and as he neared the first corner. he heard Shadwell's voice suddenly and stopped, drawing his gun, just within the concealing shelter of the house's edge.

It occurred to him that at his usual gait the bishop had had just about time to reach his house, and had gone around to the door at the farther side which he commonly used, Shadwell had probably taken the other side of the road, and had managed to pass the bishop on the way, unobserved in the dark. He had been waiting for the bishop around the corner of the house, and had confronted him there. That was it! He, Hammond, had managed to arrive just in time!

Hammond edged himself along against the rough wall of the little house, ready to intervene at an instant's notice.

HE heard clearly Shadwell's ugly snarl, low-pitched as it was, around the corner of the house.

"I said shove up yo' han's, —— yo'! Shove 'em up, now, right sudden—'way up—or I'll blow yo' to ——!"

"But, my dear sir"—it was the bishop's clear voice—"can't you see that it is out of the question? I can not move my right hand because it is bandaged tight."

"Then shove up yo' good arm—*pronto*, now—yo' mis'ble li'l pup yo'!"

Ed Hammond stepped softly around the corner. He had guessed, correctly, that the bishop would be facing him, Shadwell standing so as to present his back, facing the bishop. He saw Shadwell's back and slouching shoulders, and the little bishop beyond him, his free left hand and arm perpendicular, the huge white bandage which confined the other conspicuous in the dimness of early evening. Shadwell was edging up toward the bishop, his gun held upon him.

What could he be up to, exactly? Then Hammond saw through it. He was intending, first, to secure the roll of bills. When he had once got that safely away from the bishop, he could easily overcome the slightly built, elderly and now disabled little man. He would not risk the sound of a gunshot.

Hammond raised his forty-five.

But he was very unexpectedly interrupted. There came from close at hand a roar which made him jump, and ruined his steady aim.

Shadwell had shot down the little man after all.

Ed plunged forward. A gun was too good for Shadwell. He wanted to get his big powerful hands on him and choke the miserable life out of his worthless carcass.

He stopped, confused in the dim light. The figure which he had dimly perceived as it tottered and fell to the ground in a limp heap lay almost under his feet. It writhed and rolled about, and from it there came a steady stream of profanity.

At a little distance there stood the bishop, busily engaged with his left hand in unwinding the huge bandage from his right hand and arm.

"What the—" gasped Hammond.

"Ah, it is you, is it not, Mr. Hammond?" said the bishop. "You quite startled me, I assure you."

He threw the loosened bandage to the ground and, transferring from his right hand to his left the double-barreled derringer from which a thin wisp of acrid smoke yet rose, he handed the deadly little weapon back to its rightful owner.

"Doctor Ellis was very obliging," remarked the bishop, rubbing his cramped right hand which had just discharged the derringer through the bandage. "He took great pains with this arrangement. You see, Mr. Hammond, I have been for years unused to firearms, and so I could take no chances. That is why I waited until Shadwell came so close that I could hardly miss. I shot him—accurately, I think—through the right shoulder, so as to disable his gun arm. I hope I have not injured him too severely."

Around the corner of the house came a confused group of men, in the lead, Tom Hankins, a deputy sheriff, carrying a lantern in one hand, a glistening blue-barreled forty-five in the other.

"What's all this rannikaboo?" inquired Hankins in a voice of authority.

By the light of the lantern the bystanders envisaged the scene. They looked at the bishop, the bandage on the ground; they sniffed the sharp smell of burned cloth which rose from the crumpled bandages. Hankins, stooping over, hauled the still cursing Shadwell roughly to his feet. His right arm hung helpless. One of the men picked up his undischarged revolver and looked at it curiously.

"You come along with me to the calaboose, Shadwell," said Hankins grimly. "We've had our eyes on you for some time and now I reckon we've got you to rights."

Hankins led away his captive, the other men closing in around them as they wended their way back toward the calaboose.

The bishop looked at Ed Hammond who stood, his jaw hanging, and again the bishop smiled like a happy child.

"I can not help wishing that I had not been obliged to resort to such an expedient, Mr. Hammond," he remarked, as he picked up the bandages and turned toward his house, "but you may remember that we are exhorted in the Scriptures to combine the harmlessness of doves with the cunning of the serpent! Good evening, Mr. Hammond, and thank you very much."

The Proving of Old Man Lindquist

By Ralph R. Perry

Author of "Stowed Away."

WARNINGS aplenty had been given them. The day before there had been an abnormally high, jumpy barometer and a ring around the moon. For ten days the skipper had complained of a "stomach-ache" and occasional shooting pains that stabbed him like a jagged knife. Yet when the blow actually fell it struck Lindquist with the numbing shock of a catastrophe unforeseen, so that he pulled off his hat to wipe the sudden perspiration from his forehead as he closed the cabin door behind him at six o'clock on that thirteenth of September.

Within Captain Powell lay helpless in bed, with both hands pressed against the right side of his abdomen to dull the intolerable agony which had dropped him in a writhing heap on the bridge, and forced him to gasp the order to have himself carried below. The command of the ship he had turned over to First Mate Lindquist—just as it became obvious that there would soon be work for a skipper to do. For outside long, slow, glassy rollers were shouldering grimly out of the southwest, though for days the wind had been easterly. The barometer had begun to fall a tenth of an inch an hour. The sun had dropped out of sight behind a towering mass of black cloud on the southwestern horizon, and a thin scud had started to race overhead toward the approaching hurricane.

"It ain't gonna be no buster. It's gonna *blow!*" growled Lindquist to himself as he tramped to the bridge, and the sight of young Johnny Turk lounging there nonchalantly, picking his teeth after supper, angered the older man.

Turk was small; quick and graceful in his movements like an Italian; and his careless air suggested that to a third mate only a year off the schoolship, with all the latest wrinkles in navigation and seamanship at his finger tips, a hurricane in the path of an old, slow freighter, the captain of which was on the point of death, was nothing to make a first mate gnaw on his mustache.

"You got the decks cleared and everything secured," Lindquist remarked grudgingly, glancing forward.

"Yup. An' I know what's the matter with the skipper, what's more," responded the youngster with a callous cheerfulness. "Acute appendicitis. If he don't get operated on quick it'll bust inside him and he'll die."

"What's that? How quick?"

"Well, the doc said he ought to be operated on at once. You see, the appendix swells up, and any minute now it may burst. It gets more dangerous every hour, the doc said."

To the third mate's amazement Lindquist suddenly whirled on his heel with a bitter imprecation, slammed his fist violently on the rail, and crossed the bridge in two long strides, seizing Turk by the breast of his jacket and holding him motionless. Lindquist's faded gray eyes bored into those of the younger man until the latter turned away his head, and tried ineffectually to pull himself from the first mate's clutches.

"Who said? What doctor? We ain't got no doctor aboard here," Lindquist threatened in cold rage. "I got enough on my mind now, Turk, without listening to any foolishness. D'ye see that swell? That means *wind*, boy! And us with a six-foot freeboard. What doctor, hey?"

"Wireless, of course," retorted Turk, angry because he was a little frightened by the vehemence of the other. "While you was down putting the skipper to bed I had Sparks call a liner that's heading east about fifty miles away. You'd told me all the skipper's symptoms, and I asked their medico what to do. He said get him to port as quick as the Lord'll let you. See?"

"Every hour's dangerous, hey?" Lindquist asked.

All at once the impetuousness and exasperation had drained away from the man. He released Turk and leaned with both elbows on the rail, his chin on his crossed wrists, staring out over the swells that the hurricane was sending racing in advance of its coming. For the first time that Turk could remember, Lindquist looked every one of his sixty-four years.

Lindquist was a queer old duck. He'd gone to sea first on a clipper sailing ship, forty-five years ago, and worked his way up to command in the days when masters still dared to crack on sail, and won their way to the cabin by the weight of their fists and the possession of nerve enough to carry all plain sail in a blow that made cautious sailors strip to reefed topsails.

But Lindquist had stayed in sail too long. The schooner he commanded had gone on Nantucket Shoals in 1904. Already owners had commenced to strip clipper ships of their masts to make coal barges of them, and Lindquist had reluctantly shipped as a third mate in steam, expecting to work his way to a skipper's billet again. Twenty years later he was only first mate. The qualifications for a captain had changed, and Lindquist was too old and too contemptuous of the twentieth century seaman to learn new tricks.

He had never saved his pay. He knew that he must follow the sea until he died, or was fired by a new breed of ship owners who thought more of economical runs than fast passengers. But before that time came he wanted to command a ship of his own again, wanted it with an intensity which only the old who have been successful and feel their powers failing can know.

He leaned on the rail with his bald head thrust forward on a thin turkey neck. His drooping mustaches, dyed black for many years, were caught in his teeth; he stared morosely at the long swells which broke with greater and greater weight against the ship's blunt bow.

"We're right in the track of the storm," he said, never moving his eyes from the sea ahead.

Turk nodded, and hastened to air the knowledge he had gained from a hurried study of "Bowditch" an hour before. This would be his first hurricane.

"We shall be on this course, if we keep on running west for Norfolk. The wind's hauled to the east-southeast an hour ago; and that, with this swell and that pile of cloud there, would put the center southwest. We're sailing right through the center, Mr. Lindquist. Don't you think we ought to bring the wind two points on our starboard quarter and run northwest for New York? That'll bring us into the navigable semicircle of the storm."

"I dodged hurricanes in the South Seas before you was born, Turk," Lindquist grunted. "Yes, and before a brassbound bunch of navy swabs had writ it all out in a book what to do. Yeah, prudence would dictate—" he mouthed the words with a heavy sarcasm— "that we turn and run for the North Pole."

He paused, and turned on the young officer with a bleak smile.

"Go git the bosun," he ordered. "Tell him to unship those ventilators, rig life lines, and double his lashings. Look over the dogging of the hatch battens yourself."

"That's all been done, sir!" Turk expostulated.

Lindquist thrust his head forward and glared.

"Maybe it was done for a course o' northwest," he growled. "But we head west, Mr. Turk. Steady as we go, and may hurricanes be ——! With luck we can make Norfolk in thirty-six hours. New York would take us another day. We're gonna git Captain Powell to a hospital before that appendix busts!"

"But you are risking the ship, sir!" cried Turk.

"That's risk. The other's sure," responded Lindquist steadily. "I done a sight of thinkin' a minute ago while I watched this sea gatherin'. When you've followed the sea as long as me, Turk, you'll know there's more than one kind of duty—and only God knows the path a hurricane'll take. Go git the bosun."

HOUR by hour the glass dropped and the wind rose. From eight that evening till midnight Turk stood the third mate's watch, testing the wind with a wet forefinger every ten minutes, hoping each time to find it had shifted to the west as an indication that the path of the storm was curving away from the course of the vessel. But the only change was in its intensity.

In his limited experience Turk had never encountered such a wind. Not that it was strong, yet. The center of the storm was still over two hundred miles away, drawing nearer at about twenty miles an hour, counting the ship's speed.

The unusual thing about the wind was that it blew in gusts, and yet there was never a lull. All at once it would blow harder. Insensibly he would wait for the wind to fall, but it would keep on blowing—for an hour. Then suddenly there would be another gust, and from a strong breeze the wind would have become a moderate gale. Still the barometer slid down, and the southwest swell began to be crossed and chopped by shorter, steeper waves running before the wind until the ship was shaken like a rat in their combined grip.

Turk was not nervous. Indeed, because of his inexperience he had no conception of what the next twelve hours would bring, but as the ship began to pitch more and more violently until he was compelled to wedge himself into the narrow space between the wheelhouse wall and the engine-room telegraphs to avoid being thrown about, an exasperated bewilderment at Lindquist's decision mounted in his breast as steadily as the mounting gale.

It was preposterous, it was unseamanlike, to risk a ship and cargo for one man's life, even the captain's. It might be all very well to make a grandstand play after a wreck, but in the ordinary run of business everybody knew the ship was more than the crew. Maybe Lindquist was giving Captain Powell a chance to escape death by appendicitis, but a lot of good that would do if he drowned him doing it!

"Anyway, the old beanpole's spiked his chance of getting the skipper's berth!" Turk snorted.

The implications of the thought were so unexpected that Turk snapped his fingers, and the helmsman behind him jumped and asked sharply if anything was wrong.

"No. Steady as you go," Turk ordered, barely loud enough to be heard in his preoccupation.

It was a cinch Lindquist would never get to be captain after this. Even his brother officers, and far less the owners ashore, would never forgive him for bucking through the center of a hurricane. It was so obvious what was going to happen, and what ordinary prudence and seamanship dictated.

The hurricane had come up so slowly that a child could have sailed around it. An unsettled barometer, then a ring around the moon, then a swell not caused by the wind, cirrus streamers plainly visible at sunset, radiating from a single spot of the southwestern horizon, later an inky mass of storm cloud at the same spot, then a falling barometer and a steady gale from the east-southeast—steady—the plainest possible indication that the ship was directly in the path of the storm.

"If he'd done what he should have," Turk muttered to himself, "he would have headed northwest. And if he had, and Captain Powell had died, we'd all a' said he'd done right to think first of his ship; and they'd have made him skipper when he got ashore for taking such good care of her.

"And he knew it! The old bald-headed, leather-necked shellback, he was thinkin' of all that while he stood there bitin' at the bridge rail and starin' out to sea! 'Get the bosun,' he says to me, 'and watch out for your lashings, 'cause the course o' this ship is west'."

The ship's bow plunged into a heavy sea, and she trembled throughout her length as the shock checked her way. Heavy spray rose in a sheet from the bow, and lashed against the chart house windows like buckshot. Turk ducked, and then grinned contemptuously at himself for his effort to avoid a little salt water.

"Wooden ships and iron men!" he quoted to himself sarcastically. "Maybe that ain't such bunk as I always thought, at that!"

He shook his head impatiently and rubbed at the glass before him, for it was late in his watch and his overstrained eyes were seeing dark patches here and there against the white water forward—such a patch as a sailing vessel would make if its running lights were extinguished by the storm, as they were more than likely to be.

"But it ain't right for him to cut off his own head that way," he went on, still half to himself. "We oughtn't to let him do it. I know he don't like the skipper. There ain't any friendship at stake. Some darn old tradition of clipper ship days, I suppose, forgot forty years ago. We officers ought to make the stubborn old fool act sensible. This ain't seamanship. Besides, the pitching's likely to kill the Old Man!"

But how could a third mate force the acting captain of a ship to change his mind? Turk studied over the problem for the rest of his watch, and later in his bunk, kept awake a moment or two by the new and louder creaks and groaning of the ship's frames forced from the old hull by the rising seas, he lay on his back, thinking—until, with a long suspiration, the idea came to him. He grinned at the ceiling, decided to put his plan into practice at once—and instantly fell asleep.

He dreamed he was being swung through a moist, gray fog on a rope ten miles long bringing up with a twist and a jerk at the end of every swing. Down the rope climbed a little naked black man with a knife in his teeth, who pointed at him and laughed and made a motion to cut the line, laughing boisterously at Turk's efforts to get out of the bonds that swathed him hand and foot. The knife flashed, and Turk went spinning miles and miles through the air, bringing up with a dreadful crash. He awoke in a heap on the stateroom floor. A sea had struck the ship so violently he had been hurled out of his bunk, and the contrary roll sent him banging back against the bunk in a tangle of blankets.

"This is what I'd call weather," Turk swore.

His wrist watch, fortunately unbroken, showed him it was half past six, almost time to dress and go on watch again anyway. He stopped at the galley for hard tack and a cup of coffee. That was all the breakfast there was. A filthy mess of oatmeal greasing the deck of the galley was all the cook had to show for his determined and futile efforts to get a hot breakfast.

Even below Turk could hear the bellowing of the shrouds, the growl of the wind in the smoke pipes, and the high-pitched whine the wind made racing through the wireless antenna. The ship rolled and ducked and twisted underfoot, and as Turk stepped out into the passageway to go forward to the cabin the wind caught the door out of his fingers with a crash, and sent him sliding fifteen feet over the wet teak, bringing him up against the iron bulwark with a blow that almost knocked him breathless.

The force of the wind was holding the seas flat, fight as they did to rise, and the ocean was a sheet of streaked white foam, without a single patch of the dark green water that darkens the forepart of combers in an ordinary gale. The wind tore the top off the waves and sent the salt water flying in a level, blinding rain, so thick Turk could not tell whether it was raining overhead or not. The clouds were racing dark and low, so he supposed it was; but the water which ran down his face was bitter salt. Gasping, he pulled himself to the handrail and staggered forward to the cabin, trusting he would find the skipper awake, and not at all sure what he would say to Powell when he got there.

Powell was awake. An overturned chair was wedged under his bed. He lay on his back, his right side lifted a little, and his short, thick arms raised above his head to grasp the brass bed rails to keep himself from sliding onto the deck.

"About time Lindquist sent one of you down to report," Powell barked. "How you making out on the topside?"

"I haven't been up since midnight," Turk stammered.

The skipper's prominent china-blue eyes, bloodshot from sleeplessness and pain, scorched the young officer from head to foot. "Guess you're the only one that did sleep. I didn't," Powell snapped in irritation. "Well, what is it then? Don't stand there doing a balancing act!"

"It's about the course, sir," Turk began.

"What about it?" Powell retorted, glancing at the telltale over his head. "Due west, I see. That's what takes us into Norfolk."

It was a most inauspicious beginning for the request Turk had to make, but he managed to swallow the lump in his throat and risk another outburst from the pain-maddened skipper.

"How's your side, sir?"

"Like some one was twisting a red-hot

knife in my guts, if you want to know," the skipper grunted.

"You see, you ought to be operated on right away," Turk persisted. "The wireless said every hour would be dangerous."

"Don't I know that!" Powell interrupted.

"So Mr. Lindquist is holding on due west for Norfolk slap through the center of a hurricane," added the third mate quietly.

Powell struggled to sit up in bed, but a lurch of the ship made him grab at his bed rail, and he sank back, his hard, fleshy face white under its stubble of golden beard. For a few seconds he lay breathing stentoriously until the pain subsided.

"So!" he managed to ejaculate at last. "What's the glass now, son?"

Turk crossed to the instrument on the wall, glanced at it, frowned; tapped it with his thumb nail to make sure it was registering.

"Twenty-nine points fifty-three," he reported.

"And you said we might run through the center! We're pretty —— well there now," Powell growled. "But why sneak down to bother me this way. Lindquist's master now."

"Because Lindquist is doing something for you you wouldn't do for yourself, sir. You wouldn't risk a ship to get yourself to a hospital quicker, would you? I thought you might want to order him to change course."

Powell gave Turk one swift glance, then dropped his eyes, and rasped with one hand at his unshaven chin.

"You do me a lot of credit, Turk," he muttered, his words muffled under his hand. "Save dividends and scrap skippers, hey?" He hesitated and then snapped peevishly, "Well, what does Mr. Lindquist want to do?"

"He wants to head west, but I think we ought to sheer off to the north'ard, and I thought if you understood you would send him orders, sir," Turk explained miserably.

It had not occurred to him that he was asking the skipper to sign his own death warrant.

"So Lindquist didn't send you to me?"

"No sir."

It was impossible to mistake the honesty of that answer. Powell was shrewd enough to notice the surprize that crossed Turk's face. The skipper shrugged his shoulders under the blankets, and smiled at the telltale with the wry expression of the down east New Englander faced with the bad luck that his native pessimism has always led him to expect.

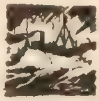
"You'll find a pad in my desk. Bring it here," he ordered.

Powell wrote a few lines, signed his name formally, and handed the sheet to Turk.

"I've ordered him to bring the wind two points on his starboard quarter and run for it, avoiding the center at all costs," he explained. "Take it up and give it to Mr. Lindquist. And Turk!"

"Yes, sir?"

"When your time comes I hope you die hard, —— your soul!"



TURK reached the bridge just as a huge flattened comber covered with a froth thick and white as soapsuds heaved up on the port quarter. The ship rolled to meet it, and its crest reached out hungrily and slapped lightly at the port lifeboats. When he had rubbed the spray out of his eyes Turk saw the boats knocked to splinters in their lashings. By his side Lindquist, the spray and rain streaming from his bald head and pouring unnoticed down the neck of his slicker, was waving back the bosun, who had pluckily darted out to cut adrift the wreckage.

"Too risky," Lindquist screamed into Turk's ear, the wind seeming to drive the words down his throat. Though they were less than a foot apart, his voice reached Turk as faintly as if it came from a long distance.

"The skipper's sent orders for you, sir," Turk screamed in reply and thrust the sheet of paper into Lindquist's hand.

Lindquist flattened it on the windbrake. It was watersoaked with spray instantly, but the penciled words, slanting down-hill in Powell's heavy, crabbed fist were clear and legible. The mate bent down to peer at them with his faded gray eyes, his bowed back, long nose, and thin shoulders making him resemble a fierce old bird of prey.

Watching him eagerly, Turk saw him nod his head with grim approval but whatever he said was snatched from his lips by the screaming gale. The soaked paper tore in two under his hands, and Lindquist wadded the fragments into a ball and flipped it over the rail.

"It's your watch but go and help the

bosun," he shouted into Turk's ear. "I won't need you on the bridge!"

As he finished speaking Lindquist turned on his heel and pulled himself along the rail to the extreme windward corner of the bridge, far beyond any possibility of giving an order to the helmsman. There he paused, eying Turk contemptuously until the third mate flushed red and fairly ran off the bridge into the shelter of the deck house where the bosun was crouching, alert to repair damage to the deck gear that could not now be long delayed.

For at last the wind was changing, hauling to the westward with an appalling rapidity which proved how close the ship was staggering to the center of the storm. At eight it had blown with hurricane force from the southeast; by ten, its force increased if anything, it was southwest; and only the sheer power of the wind prevented a cross-sea from being kicked up which would have swamped the ship in ten minutes.

As it was, the well decks were a-wash time and again, with three feet of water churning back and forth from rail to rail, for seas were shipped faster than the clanging scuttle ports could drain the water away. From a series of long combers, the sea had changed to leaping trianglar peaks which battered at the ship's bows and an instant later, from a totally different direction, swept across the waist.

On the bridge Lindquist found himself wondering how long the ship could stand the battering. The hatches were continually under water. Let just one of the wooden wedges loosen so that that rush of water could rip loose the canvas over the hatch covers, and the ship would go down. He ought by rights to heave the stern to the sea. It was what the books he despised said was the right thing to do.

The trouble was, Lindquist in all his years at sea had never seen it tried, and this was no time to experiment. The storm was passing him to southward. By noon, an hour hence, they would be past the center; probably miss it by forty miles or so. Too close. But it would be four o'clock before the sea would begin to go down.

Still, there was no use fretting like an old woman. He might as well hold his course now and trust to the strength of the gear, just as they cracked on in the old days when the mates patrolled the decks belaying pin in hand to keep terrified sailors from cutting the halliards, and the skipper stood on the poop hoping the buckling yards would stand the strain.

By noon the hurricane reached its climax, with a shrieking wind from the east-north-east, but Lindquist was already so weary and battered by his twelve-hour watch that the increased fury of the elements meant little to him. He only grunted when a frightened quartermaster reported the barometer stood 29.42 and was still going down, for the shift of the wind proved the center had already passed to south of the ship, and every hour now would see a diminution in the force of the gale.

The roar of the wind and the lash of spray had long ago driven all coherent thought from Lindquist's head. He was determined to hang on—beyond that he did not care. Shrill above the storm repeated blasts from Turk's whistle reached his ears from the after well deck, but beyond turning his head Lindquist paid no attention.

"Man overboard—poor ——, I can't do nothing," was Lindquist's comment. But as he turned he saw on the surface of the water that boiled in the well deck a strip of torn canvas, and instantly he was racing aft, with full understanding of Turk's call for help.

At last the battering of the sea had broken loose a hatch batten, and the double layer of tarpaulins which made the hatches watertight were torn. Turk was signaling to change the course to prevent, as far as possible, the seas from broaching across the well deck. But for that the seas were too high. Lindquist dashed aft without orders to the helmsman.

As his foot touched the well deck a wave jumped the rail and swept him off his feet clear across the deck into the starboard bulwark with a blow that sent a keen stab of pain through his chest. Turk and the boatswain had taken refuge at the break of the superstructure, holding on to the ladder, but at Lindquist's shouted orders they ran out between seas and helped him slip the ten-foot steel batten into its sockets.

Four times all three men were knocked headlong, four times the wet canvas was torn from their bleeding fingernails, four times they were swept to the lee rail. Each time Lindquist was the first to find his feet. His bald head would be bent over the bar before the younger men could join him, until at last, by accident largely, the edges of the canvas were caught and the bar slipped into its brackets.

"I'll hold it while ye drive the dogs," Lindquist spluttered through the choking spray.

Hold it he did—squatting on the deck, one foot braced against a ringbolt, the water swirling around his knees and going over his head for thirty seconds at a time when a sea was shipped; thrown against the hatch until his bald head was striped with the blood from three scalp wounds.

Turk, half under water himself, frantically plied hammer on the hardwood wedges, determined to drive more than the boatswain, who was working from the opposite end. He failed, because twice a dog was washed away by a wave before he had a chance to settle it into place by a blow, but after fifteen minutes of desperate work the job was done. Even after the driving of the end dogs kept the batten in place, Lindquist had remained squatting on the deck. Not that he was doing any good there any longer.

"The job's done, sir," Turk reported, puzzled.

"Pick me up, then. That second —— sea broke my ankle," Lindquist ordered.

He had no other comment to make until Turk had carried him into his own bunk and laid him dripping on the blankets. Then as the third mate set about bandaging his head he jerked himself away impatiently.

"Get up on the bridge and relieve the second," he directed impatiently. "The course is west, and make as much speed as you can as the sea goes down. Crowd her, Turk!"

JUST before noon on the following day Turk dropped anchor in Hampton Roads. The square blue-and-white flag that signals for medical assistance in the International Code was flying from the fore rigging, and the salt-crusted smoke pipes, the shattered boats and twisted davits bore testimony to the battle with the sea. A launch carrying a doctor came alongside immediately, and after a few words of explanation the physician hurried to the cabin, while Turk himself went below to prepare Lindquist for the trip ashore.

"How's the skipper—will he get to the hospital in time?" asked the injured man.

"The doc thinks so," Turk answered apathetically. "I suppose you think I'm a yellow pup, Mr. Lindquist," the young man continued slowly. "I know the skipper will hate the sight of me, so I'm going on the beach. But before I go I'd like to say that I wish you could be captain of this ship. I'd like to sail under you, sir."

Lindquist flushed with embarrassment, but a satisfied pride shone in his old gray eyes.

"I did think ye was yellow when you brought me that order, but I changed my mind when you worked on the hatch," he confessed. "I guess you're still young, Turk."

"But what did you do it for!" cried the young man. "It wasn't seamanship, and if you hadn't knocked up the ship you'd probably have been made skipper. Don't you want a command? Powell would have pulled through, probably. He's tough!"

"It wasn't for Powell's sake altogether, Turk," Lindquist replied thoughtfully. "Don't know as you'll understand it when I tell ye. I've commanded ships in my day. Real ships, when bein' master meant more than it does now. I don't want the job, so much. I wanted to show myself I was still fit to take command."

"You mean you had the nerve to make a decision and the guts to stick to it?" Turk asked.

Lindquist grinned.

"Ain't you young schoolship squirts educated!" he mocked. "Something like that, son."

"NO DISCRETION AT ALL"

by Clements Ripley

Author of "Pass Till Midnight," "Enough Rope," etc.

YOU will pardon me, sir, if I say what is the truth? This American, then, was a fool. Brave, yes; but with no discretion at all. Let me tell you.

When the bull tossed the gray pony upon his horns so that the picador barely escaped with his life, and all the ladies and gentlemen clapped and shouted like mad, he rose up, this great, red, mountain of a man, and grabbed Don Jose Itorbede by the neck.

No, there was no enmity between them, sir. It was just that Don Jose had the misfortune to be sitting nearest. And this American shouted, "So this is your idea of a good time, is it? Well try this for a change."

And he kicked Don Jose's pants very severely. Was that nice?

But he found out pretty quick he had picked the wrong man, for Don Jose was proud and spirited, and he wouldn't stand for nothing like that. He called the cops. They climbed on to this American, six of them, and they subdued him, although he fought like a lion of the mountains. A fierce scrap, let me tell you, sir.

One who saw it was Colonel Ramon Aguilar, the commander of the Federal garrison. He knew a fighter when he saw one, and as they were dragging this American off to prison he stopped them.

"Wait," he said, and then turning to the disturber, "what is your name, hombrecito? And what are you doing this side of the line?"

"What the —— is it to you?" demanded the American, who was hot with fighting.

His shirt was tore open, and on his great red chest there lay a little metal tag such as your soldiers wear, sir. Colonel Aguilar did not say nothing, but he reached out and picked it up. He had an eye for everything, that Aguilar.

"James Shane," he read. "Sergeant, something or other Field Artillery, U. S. A."

Then he smiled with all his white teeth and stroked his mustache, while James Shane glared from under his red brows.

"So," he said quietly. "It looks like you had got yourself into a mess, my friend."

James Shane didn't say nothing, but from the look on his face he had begun to think so, too.

"It looks like you would get cast into the jug," went on Aguilar, "and maybe never get out. That would be a pity for a fighter like you are."

He stopped and shrugged his shoulders. James Shane looked down at the two cops hanging on to each of his arms, and he glanced around at the two more behind him.

"What's on your mind?" he growled.

"You have got yourself in bad," Aguilar

told him. "But I hate to see a man like you get himself wasted in the calaboso. As it happens I have just busted my Chief of Field Artillery, because he was a bonehead who did not know nothing. We might be useful to each other."

Well, it did not take this James Shane no time at all to make up his mind. On the one hand was maybe fame and fortune with Colonel Aguilar, and on the other the hoosegow. Yes, he thought he would better accept, as he was just starting a furlough from the Army of the United States anyhow and did not have to be back in a hurry.

"You are on," he agreed, and Colonel Aguilar motioned to the cops to release him, which they was very glad to do.

So at one stroke this James Shane become the Chief of Field Artillery of the Federal garrison. What do you know about that, sir? And right away he showed Aguilar that he had not made no mistake in his judgment.

There was four cannons which it took six horses apiece to draw, and Aguilar let him pick fifty men. And he demanded also sufficient wagons to carry the ammunition, and got them, for this artillery was the colonel's especial pride.

Then he trained those men. He taught them to work those cannons and to keep them clean, and the horses also he required to be brushed twice each day, so that they shone like glass. Let me tell you, sir, they looked fine. And if any man complained of the hard work this James Shane handed him a swift kick in the pants.

He never rested, this great, red bull of a man, nor he did not let none of the men under him rest, neither. He made them work until they was ready to set down and weep. But he saw to it that they had the best grub in the garrison and the best uniforms, so that they begun to get proud and stiff-necked and think they was the whole thing.

He would go to Aguilar and demand more of this or that, and bang his great hand with the back covered with red hair on the colonel's table. And whatever Aguilar would not give him he would steal. By goodness, sir, he was a hard-boiled guy.

He was crafty, that Aguilar, and sometimes he begun to worry for fear James Shane might take his men and go and make a revolution of his own. Then he would laugh at his own fears and say:

"What am I thinking about? This guy is nothing but a big bum. He ain't got sense enough to do any harm." But all the same he was not quite easy in his mind.

HOWEVER, when James Shane had been with him for a short time he got something else to worry about. It was just turning dark one evening when a man arrived on a lathering horse with word that the revolutionaries under General Carlos Ferrara himself had captured Agua Pintada.

A terrible guy, sir, this Carlos Ferrara, who was called El Toro on account he would get mad if things didn't go to suit him and roar like a wild bull. He had hanged the *jefe* of Agua Pintada and cut off his ears, and he was fixing to drive away all the cattle and sheeps and not leave those poor son-of-a-guns nothing but their shirts.

When Colonel Ramon Aguilar heard the news he showed that he too could fly into a terrible rage. His eyes blazed and he kicked his *muchacho* across the room. Then he rushed out hot-foot and called his men to arms. Within half an hour they were riding —— bent for Agua Pintada, and behind them came James Shane with his artillery.

They rode all night, and about an hour before dawn Colonel Aguilar seen the lights which told him that the rebels was still holding the town. But by this time his rage had give way to caution and he decided to delay a little and think it over. A little bit after, the artillery came up, and James Shane strode over and asked him what in —— he was waiting for.

"I was thinking," said Aguilar, "that I don't have no idea how many revolutionaries is holding that town. Suppose I attack, how do I know but I will lose a lot of men and horses, maybe?"

"What do you think you've got artillery for?" demanded James Shane. "Stick around and I'll show you something."

He went back to his cannons. It was beginning to be light by this time, and a moment later Aguilar heard four shots, *bang—bang—bang—bang*, like that, and in Agua Pintada the bricks began to fly out of the houses. Within fifteen minutes there was not a building left standing.

"That is enough," said Aguilar, and he rode in at the head of his men just as the last of the revolutionaries was beating it over the hill. Yes, they thought they had better go away from there.

But those poor people of Agua Pintada, sir, they was so grateful to him for saving them from those robbers that they come crawling out from the ruins to kiss his hand. What do you know about that, sir? And a lot of them was so enthusiastic that they asked permission to enlist under his banner, as their houses was knocked for a row of ash-cans and there was no use staying at home any more.

Now this Aguilar was crafty, and on the way home he thought it over and decided that he would better make sure of this James Shane for all time. So that night he called him to his quarters.

"Don Jaime," he said, for up to this time this American held no regular rank. His men called him El Rojo on account of his hair. "Don Jaime, in the name of the Republic I thank you for this day's work. and your valor shall have a better reward than thanks. Tonight I am writing to headquarters to recommend that you be made a captain. You certainly made those bums step out."

Aguilar had expected this to tie James Shane up and put him where he wouldn't have no reason to want to go away, but James Shane gave a laugh.

"Thanks," he said, "but don't bother. My furlough is up pretty quick and I've got to get back to my outfit."

Colonel Aguilar didn't know whether to be mad or relieved. But he concealed his thoughts. He was a foxy bird, that Aguilar.

"You speak very sure of yourself," he said coldly.

"Why not?" retorted James Shane. "You don't think you could stop me, do you? Why if the United States ever heard that you were trying to hold me they'd come down here and wipe you off the map."

He was a fool, this American. If he had decided to remain with Aguilar he might have gone far. But although he had courage he had not brains. See now how he let the Colonel play him for a sucker.

"You are a man of importance, then?" asked Aguilar, and he pretended to be impressed.

"Importance! You ask any guy who's handled a battery whether a top-kick has got any importance. He'll tell you a good one, like I am, is about three jumps ahead of a brigadier general."

Now this was exactly what Aguilar wished to know. Top-kick he did not understand—Do you, sir?—but he knew that a brigadier general is the whiskers of the cat in the Army of the United States. And he had a plan in mind. By goodness, sir, that bird was clever.

He made it appear that he was undecided.

"But the artillery? What would happen to that if you went away?" he wanted to know.

This James Shane didn't have no more sense than to spill it out.

"Any one could handle them now I've got them trained," he told him. "I've been breaking in Benito Gonzales for the job. He could take it over tomorrow."

What do you know about that, sir? This bonehead had fixed it so that Aguilar could get along just as well without him, and now he admitted it.

The colonel caressed his thin, black mustache to hide a smile. "So," he said. "You have done well, Don Jaime. That makes me feel better. I will think over your request and let you know."

"Where do you get that request stuff?" James Shane demanded to know. "I'm not asking, I'm telling you. And I've got the United States Army to back me up."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he smiled with a wave of his hand, and James Shane went away from there.

Now hear the subtlety of this Ramon Aguilar. For the threat of intervention he snapped his fingers. Your great, rich, government does not send armies to protect its citizens in Mexico, sir. But it does pay ransoms, and this Aguilar knew. And Aguilar needed money, as who does not, sir.

For a long time after James Shane was gone he sat in thought, his chin resting on his hand. For an officer of the Federal government to arrange such a matter is difficult and takes much planning. Without a doubt if he were to try to hold this American the matter would get reported to his commanding officer, and he would get busted and lose all that lovely money besides. No, he was too smart to be caught like that, sir.

FOR once he begun to wish he was not a Federal officer, and when he thought of all them fat dollars that the United States would pay to get James Shane back he was almost tempted to make a revolution himself. But there is more ways than one to skin a cat, and after a while the thought come to him, "What of El Toro?"

Now El Toro was a bandit, and an open enemy of the government, who was making a revolution like I have said, sir, and for a patriot like him to hold an important American for ransom would seem quite natural.

So after a while Colonel Aguilar smiled again and took up his pen and performed a long letter. And this was his plan: El Toro was to capture this American and then to notify the President of the United States that he was holding him for fifty thousand dollars ransom, and that if same was not paid within ten days he would shoot him dead. And then them two would split all that beautiful money. What do you know about that, sir?

"And," said this Aguilar to himself, "the money will be paid through my hands as officer of the Government, and it will be a —— of a note if I can't double-cross this son of a gun El Toro who is a traitor and has not got no brains besides." By goodness, he was a slick one, that Aguilar.

So when he had finished his letter and explained where El Toro was to have his men in readiness he called a man of his force who knew he could trust and told him to deliver it with all speed.

By next evening the messenger came back hot-foot to tell him that El Toro was sold on the proposition and to send the guy along.

Aguilar did not lose no time in sending for James Shane, and when he appeared he rose and slapped him on the shoulder.

"Don Jaime," he said, "you are a man who it is not a pleasure to lose. But I am a fair man with a big heart. In consideration of your services I am going to let you go."

"You better believe it," responded James Shane.

"How will day after tomorrow suit you?" asked Aguilar. "I would say tomorrow, but there is one last favor I wish you would do for me first."

"That's fair enough. What have you on your mind?"

Then Aguilar explained that he had word that there was strong revolutionary sympathy in the village of Menadnos, and that he wanted to locate an artillery position in case he might wish to attack the town as he had Agua Pintada.

"You would better go alone," he finished craftily. "Them traitorous revolutionaries is all around and they would maybe get wise to a party where one man would not excite no suspicion."

This sounded all right to James Shane, who, as I have told you, sir, was a fool. And so the next morning he started off by himself, not telling no one where he was going.

About noon he came in sight of Menadnos, and no sooner did he dismount off his horse than a dozen of El Toro's brave boys rose up out of the *mesa* and covered him with their rifles.

Well, sir, this James Shane was not so much of a fool as to put up a scrap. Instead he put up his hands. Then two of them approached and took away his pistol and handcuffed his hands in front of him.

Then they boosted him on to his horse and took his reins, and the whole gang rode like the —— was chasing them. For six hours they never stopped for nothing, and at the end they came to El Toro's camp in the mountains.

The place used to be a mine, sir, owned by one of your countrymen, but the terrible hand of war had so often been laid on it that he found it was no use to try to work it any more and had gone to Washington to protest. So now the hacienda made a dandy headquarters for El Toro.

He was taking his ease, like he generally did after dinner, with his vest unbuttoned and his feet on the table, and it might be that he also dozed, for he was a stout man and not so active as before he become a general.

But he opened his eyes as they brought in this great, red American, and they glistened as he thought of all that delicious money he was going to have.

This James Shane was a fool, sir, like I have said, and he never knew when to shut up. So now, when he saw El Toro at his ease like that he did not use no discretion at all. He grinned and said—

"Hello, Fatty."

El Toro leaped to his feet with a frightful oath, for he allowed no man to kid him about his shape.

"Silence, pig," he roared, and he swung his hand and slapped James Shane across the mouth.

Then he noticed that James Shane was handcuffed and he turned to the guards.

"Get out," he thundered. "I will attend to this guy myself."

They were glad enough to go away from there I can tell you, sir, for the rage of El Toro was a terrible thing.

By goodness, he was mad. He stamped so that the house shook and for a minute it looked like he would draw out his gun and shoot James Shane to death right there. But pretty quick he remembered them fifty thousand dollars and his wrath cooled a little.

"Know, *hombre*," he snarled, for he was still good and mad, "that I am Carlos Ferrara, the patriot, and for two cents I would hang up your measly carcass by the thumbs and cut off your ears."

James Shane laughed. "I'm an American citizen," he said. "Don't forget that."

"Oh, you are, are you?" growled the general. "I suppose your government would raise —— if anything happened to you."

"You bet your life it would."

El Toro smiled until his little eyes disappeared in his cheeks, and he chuckled, too.

"Your government don't do nothing until after a guy is dead," he sneered. "And then they keep right on doing nothing. And besides, I'm a hard guy to catch."

Well, this gave James Shane something to think about I tell you sir. By gum it made him feel pretty sick, but he didn't say nothing, and pretty quick El Toro spoke again.

"But maybe I won't shoot you at that, *hombre*," he told him. "Because you might turn out to be worth something to me."

That cheered James Shane up a little.

"How do you mean?" he wanted to know.

El Toro sat down again and stretched his feet out on the table. Then he cocked his eye at James Shane and, "Listen, Americano," he began, "I guess you are a pretty important guy in your country, eh?"

At that James Shane begun to take heart. "Now you're talking," he agreed, and sat down on the table next to the general's feet.

"I expect it would be worth something to them to get you back again," the general went on. "Fifty thousand dollars, maybe?"

RIGHT away James Shane seen what he meant. He leaned forward.

"Now, General, let's be reasonable," he begged. "Let's talk this thing over. That's a lot of money."

El Toro's little eyes gleamed. He was greedy, that man.

"For a great, rich country like yours," he proclaimed, "it ain't nothing. Especially for such an important guy like you are."

"Now listen a second, General," protested James Shane. "I ain't so important as all that. Listen now, what do you say to ten thousand?"

El Toro laughed so that his great, heavy shoulders shook, and snapped his fingers.

"Bunk, *amigo*," he chuckled. "Fifty thousand is little enough when a guy is maybe going to get skinned alive and his hide hung up on the line fence for a warning."

By goodness, sir, he would have done it, too. He was a tough bird, that Carlos Ferrera.

And James Shane knew it. But he knew that there wasn't nobody would pay fifty thousand dollars for him dead or alive, and he felt like he was a gone sucker. Still, he was brave like I have said, and he figured it wouldn't hurt to delay as long as he could. Perhaps, he thought, the Most High Ruler of Destiny might take pity on him and slip him a new deal.

"It wouldn't get you nothing to kill me," he reminded El Toro. "The government don't pay nothing for a dead guy. And they might make it uncomfortable for you at that."

"No, *hombre*," the general agreed. "Killing you wouldn't be so nice as having fifty thousand dollars, but it would be some satisfaction. And your government would probably demand apologies and money, and them traitorous Federals would have to pay it because they can't get me."

"But I am a man of a great, big heart," he went on. "I'm giving you a swell chance. Here on the table is a pen and paper. Write a letter to Washington and tell them my offer."

James Shane looked where the general pointed, and his heart like to skipped a beat, for there on the other side of El Toro's feet lay a hand grenade.

There are many such in the United States camps along the border, sir, and with a great many unprincipled son-of-a-guns about it is not strange that a few find their way across the line. A sad thing, but hard to prevent. Do you not think so, sir?

Well, when James Shane seen one used as a paperweight, almost in reach of his hand his eyes like to stuck out of his head. But he never let on. Instead he stalled for time to make a plan.

"How do I know that when you get the fifty thousand you won't put me across anyhow?" he wanted to know.

El Toro frowned. "You have the word of a patriot," he announced.

"Oh," said James Shane, but he did not say it like he was very enthusiastic. Then after a minute, "I suppose that will have to do," and he leaned forward like he was going to reach for the pen and paper.

El Toro smiled and stuck his thumbs in the armholes of his vest.

"You are a wise guy, *amigo*," he chuckled. "It is better to—Hey, *hombre*, what are you doing?"

For instead of reaching over the general's legs James Shane had shoved his arms under them and thrown him off his balance so that he hit the floor with a crash.

El Toro was brave, but what he seen when he leaped to his feet with a terrible oath and his pistol in his hand made him go suddenly weak all over.

"Hey, wait!" he screamed. "Stop!"

For this James Shane held the grenade in his hands and was even now about to pull out the pin.

El Toro knew that if that pin once come out there was nothing could stop that bomb from going off and blowing him into the hereafter. In his agitation he dropped his gun to the floor, but perhaps he would not have fired it anyhow on account of them fifty thousand dollars. What do you think, sir?

James Shane stood with the pin between his fingers and his head on one side, and, "What," he said, "have you got to say about it, huh?"

For a second El Toro thought he would make a break for the door and he made a wild glance around, but James Shane got him out of that idea pretty quick.

"Don't try it," he warned. "A play like that would certainly cost the revolution one fat general."

Big beads of sweat stood out on El Toro's forehead, but a thought come into his mind. "If that thing went off it would kill you just as much as me," he suggested.

"What of it? It would be better than being skinned and hung up on the line fence." And James Shane pretended to give the pin a little jerk, so that El Toro went gray in the face and clutched the edge of the table.

"Wait," he begged. "Please! Don't do nothing we might both be sorry for. Let's talk this thing over. I never meant that about the line fence. I am a man of a great, big heart, and I wouldn't never do a thing like that. I was just fooling you."

"Well," admitted James Shane, "you certainly fooled me good. I thought all the time that you meant it. In fact you done it so good that I still do."

By goodness that made El Toro feel pretty sick, for he knew James Shane was on to him. But he still had hopes to avoid being blown to pieces. A fearful death, do you not think so, sir?

"Listen," he urged. "I give you my word to send you safe across the border. Listen, isn't that fair?"

James Shane considered with his red head a little bent and his fingers playing with the pin, while El Toro held his breath. At last he slowly shook his head.

"Not good enough," he announced. "I couldn't risk it."

"No, general," he went on, "I guess if your friends want any souvenirs they'd better come 'round in about five minutes with a basket."

When El Toro heard that his knees became like water and he gave himself up for lost. But still he made one more attempt.

"Wait! Please!" he cried. "I would go with you. I would be security for you. Please!"

When he seen James Shane hesitate, El Toro took heart. "Don't do nothing wild," he pleaded. "Why not talk it over reasonable?"

"Well," said James Shane slowly, "there might be something in that. But I don't see anything to talk about until I get these handcuffs off."

"Hold on," he commanded as the general took a step toward the door. "I'll do that part myself."

He walked over to the door and opened it just a little. "Now call one of your men," he ordered, "and tell him to throw in the key to these cuffs. But don't tell him anything else if you want to stay all in one piece."

El Toro done like he was told, and a minute later he had the key.

"Now unlock them," said James Shane, "and do it very careful— Ah! that's better," and he stretched his arms wide. "You were saying something about coming along with me?"

The blood flowed back into El Toro's heart, and he breathed again. "You will see," he cried. "You will be safe with me. I swear it on the honor of a patriot."

For a moment James Shane regarded him with his red brows knotted. Then he grinned like he had suddenly thought of something that pleased him.

"All right," he said. "Turn 'round."

El Toro obeyed mighty quick. He was glad to do anything to keep this guy from changing his mind. But he was startled when he felt James Shane take hold of his belt in the back and shove that bomb right down into the seat of his pants. What do you know about that, sir?

But first he tied a string to the pin and looped the other end around his own wrist.

"There," he said. "I wouldn't try no monkey business now, general. You would be sorry, but you wouldn't be sorry long. Let's go."

THEY left the house side by side with James Shane holding the string, and the general walking very careful. It sure made El Toro feel bad to see what a fix he was in. Think of it, sir. All around was his brave boys, laying around smoking their cigarettes or dozing in the shade, with their rifles close by.

A word from their leader and any one of them would maybe have given his life for him. And he didn't dare say that word. Instead, when one or two looked up kind of surprized to see them walking together like that, he had to talk and laugh like him and James Shane was sincere friends.

Back of the hacienda was the stables, and there they stopped. El Toro called the *mozo.*

"Saddle two of the best horses," he ordered. "I am going away from here."

"Pardon me, General," interposed James Shane. "One will be enough. Riding might be fatal to a man with your complaint."

El Toro hadn't figured on nothing like this. He was a heavy man and had got heavier in the past year with a lot of soft living.

"Do I have to walk?" he gasped, turning pale.

James Shane grinned. "Figure it out for yourself," he told him. "It would be a pity to lose a good horse like that."

"But *Madre de Dios*," groaned the general. "To walk all the way!"

"Well," answered James Shane, "any time you want to stop walking I'll be glad to drag you, and when we come to the river you can swim."

When he heard that El Toro gave a great groan, for he seen he was in an even worse fix than he had thought. It was a terrible prospect that lay before him, sir, but there was a worse one close behind, so he bowed his head and as soon as the horse was brought and the saddle pockets filled with grain they started without no more argument.

It was dark by this time. James Shane mounted and tied the string to his saddle horn.

"I hope this is a quiet horse," he remarked, and the general didn't say nothing, but he hoped so too.

They went on and on, with the stars coming out overhead and the sand and *mesquite* turning silver as the moon rose. A lovely sight, sir, the *mesa* by moonlight.

But El Toro cared nothing for it. Several times he thought his legs was going to give out under him, but every time he was about to give up the thought of that bomb in the seat of his pants come to him, and it almost seemed like he could feel it swelling. By goodness, sir, it made his flesh crawl.

But at last James Shane seen that he could not go no farther and he stopped. El Toro crumpled up at the knees and pitched forward onto the ground. James Shane took the handcuffs out of his pocket and fastened his wrists together. Then he picketed the horse, and after that he looped the string around his own wrist so that he could feel the least pull on it and layed down to sleep.

If the general had been at his best he might have tried, even with the handcuffs on him, to get rid of that bomb, but the last few hours had took the pep out of him. He was a licked bird and he knew it. And when James Shane woke up at dawn much refreshed and fed the horse, he found El Toro like he had left him.

That morning was torture to the unfortunate general, sir. He had not slept long and his feet was sore, besides which he had not had no breakfast. He panted and sweated in the terrible heat. By noon his eyes was bloodshot and he staggered as he walked. And when he thought of the man who had got him into this fix he swore a terrible oath.

Pity poor Carlos Ferrera, sir. Only for that stiffneck Aguilar he would now be setting in his hacienda surrounded by his brave boys and drinking *tequilla* or even *aguardiente.*

"One thousand dollars," he gasped, "I would give to come face to face with that son of a gun."

"That is a lot of money," remarked James Shane. "Who is it that you want to see so bad?"

"Aguilar," panted the general, and because he was now beyond all caution he added several curses.

James Shane laughed. "If that's all," he answered, "I'll stake you to a good long look at him tonight and it won't cost you a cent."

El Toro stopped so short that James Shane had to rein his horse back on its haunches to avoid pulling the pin. "What?" he hollered. "Colonel Ramon Aguilar?".

"That's him," confirmed James Shane. "Who did you expect?"

This was the first time it had occurred to El Toro that they were not going to head for the border, and the news was something not to his taste. He had a price on his head, this El Toro, dead or alive, and well he knew that traitorous Aguilar would set about to collect it in the easiest way. Also he knew that Aguilar would wish his silence in the matter of their plan regarding James Shane, and would have his own ideas about how to get it. No, decidedly he did not wish to go to his headquarters.

All this flashed through his mind very swiftly and he came to a quick decision.

"Listen, *amigo,*" he said earnestly, "This Aguilar is a stiffneck who don't mean you no good—you no more than me. Listen—" And in a few words he told James Shane of the plot the colonel had made to double cross him and share his ransom.

"I am glad I found out in time," he finished, "for you were fixing to put both our heads in the noose."

James Shane listened with one leg over the saddle horn and his red head a little on one side. When El Toro had finished he bent his brows and considered a while.

"I always had an idea there was a nigger in that bird's woodpile," he said at length. "But you've got your ax to grind too. How do I know that you aren't joking in that playful way of yours, like you did about skinning me and hanging me on the line fence? Huh?"

For a moment El Toro didn't know what to say, and then like a flash he remembered Aguilar's letter. A second later he was holding it out at arm's length.

"The proof," he cried. "Read, and learn the treachery of that son-of-a-gun."

James Shane spread the letter on his knee. He read it through once with a smile that seemed to be all on one side of his mouth. Then he read it again, and after that he stared out across the *mesa.*

"THE cheap crook," he said slowly. "Double-cross me, would he?" He folded the letter and flipped it against the back of his hand. Then he put it in his pocket, while El Toro watched him with a hope that changed to despair at his next words.

"Come on," he said. "We'll just about make it by dark," and he picked up his reins.

"What?" gasped El Toro, who couldn't believe he had heard it right. "You don't trust your own eyes? You are still going to put yourself in that stiffneck's power?"

"You bet I believe my own eyes. After this you couldn't keep me away from Aguilar with the Fourth Artillery. Come on."

"Are you mad, then, that you want to die?"

James Shane grinned, but this time it was on both sides of his mouth. "I'm not going to die," he explained, "and neither are you if you're a good boy and do what you're told. Listen, now."

It was a mad scheme that he unfolded, sir, with a thousand chances to fail and only one to succeed. El Toro begged and pleaded and pointed out how, even if they made it stick, it wouldn't get them nothing, but James Shane was firm as a rock.

"I'm taking just as much chance as you are," was all he would say. "It's up to you. If you pull it off your troubles will be over. Of course if you don't—well, that's something else again."

In the end he had his way. What could the poor general do but agree, sir?

"I will try it," he finally gave in with a heavy sigh, "but it can never succeed."

"It better had," was all the comfort he got.

They plodded on through that terrible

heat, but now El Toro was feeling too bad over what was ahead of him to think about his sufferings. It happens like that sometimes, does it not, sir? And just after dark they came over a little rise and saw the twinkling lights of the Federal garrison.

James Shane dismounted and tied his horse, for if all went well he expected to have need of him again before long. Then he took the handcuffs from his pocket.

"Hold out your left wrist," he commanded, and when El Toro had obeyed he snapped one side of the handcuff onto it. The other side he left open.

"You know what you're going to do?" he asked. "This is one time when you don't want to make any mistake."

El Toro nodded unhappily. He had faith in nothing only that he was putting his head in a trap, and that if he got hanged he would be a lucky guy. But he felt that bomb in his pants and knew there was nothing for it but to obey.

Colonel Aguilar was in his quarters just beginning his dinner when he looked up and seen James Shane in the doorway. By goodness, sir, that was the last man he expected to see. His spoon stopped half-way to his mouth and his eyes went wide. But it was only for a second. That Aguilar was crafty, sir, like I have told you, and he made it seem like his surprize was one-half joy.

He leaped from his chair and came forward with both hands out. "Don Jaime," he exclaimed. "This is pleasure. I heard you had been caught by the rebels."

James Shane laughed a little. "They caught me," he admitted, "but I didn't stay caught. In fact I brought one along back with me. That's fair, ain't it?"

Then for the first time Aguilar caught sight of El Toro, who was a little behind in the shadow.

"Ha!" he cried. "What's this? Trot him out, *amigo*, and let's have a look at him."

He stared as El Toro came into the light. "His face looks familiar," he began. "Now where—" And then he broke off and cracked his hand down on his thigh.

"——," he shouted. "It's that fat rascal Carlos Ferrara himself. What do you know about that?"

His joy was the real thing this time and no mistake, for he remembered that there was a large price on the head of El Toro, and he reflected that if he didn't stand to make quite as much as he had expected out of James Shane, at least it was a very nice sum, with promotion and glory enough to make up the difference. Besides, he still had James Shane, and there was other bandits.

"This beats everything," he marveled. "Tell me right away how on earth you managed to do it."

So James Shane begun his story, and when he come to the part where he put the grenade in the seat of El Toro's pants, with the string tied to the pin, Aguilar laughed until his ribs ached.

"No, Don Jaime," he gasped at length, wiping his eyes. "Don't ask me to believe that. It's too much." And he rocked again with laughter.

"Take a look and see it for yourself," James Shane told him. "But be careful not to pull the string. It would be just as hard on you as it would on him."

"I believe you," said Aguilar, still laughing as he stepped over and took El Toro by the arm to turn him round.

By goodness, sir, his laugh changed mighty quick as the open end of the handcuff snapped on his wrist.

Too late he seen that he was trapped and sprang back with an oath, but El Toro had braced himself and like to jerked him off his feet.

"Steady, Colonel," warned James Shane. "Don't forget that I still have hold of the string."

"For this you shall hang at dawn," snarled Aguilar, breathing hard, but he stood very still all the same. "As for this fat fool——"

"Forget it," interrupted El Toro, who had now begun to take heart. "If this bomb goes off you will be just as dead as anybody."

Aguilar glared at him. "Shut up," he raged. "This is a trick you two have arranged between you, but you won't get away with it. I am not so easy fooled as to think you have a real bomb there."

"All you've got to do to find out is to call your men," suggested James Shane. "Want to try it?"

By goodness that was a terrible minute for El Toro, while they stared at each other, Aguilar with his mouth twisted in a snarl under his waxed mustache, and James Shane smiling grimly. But at last it was the colonel who dropped his eyes.

"Don't forget, though," he muttered, "that my turn will come."

"It will have to come fast," James Shane assured him. "We are leaving for the Border in a very short time."

He turned to El Toro and waved his hand toward the table where Aguilar's dinner was set out. "Hop to it," he invited. "You've got a lot of traveling to do yet."

EL TORO did not waste no time in getting at it. He was already weak from hunger, and he ate like a wolf. James Shane also refreshed himself and they finished with a glass apiece of the colonel's *aguardiente*.

By goodness, sir, Colonel Aguilar was mad. He ground his teeth together and bit his nails. But even with all his men within call he did not dare open his mouth. Instead, when they had finished, he had to walk, side by side with El Toro, right across the square and out beyond to where James Shane had left his horse. He even had to answer to the challenges of the sentries. What do you think of that, sir?

They traveled all night and until noon the next day before they came to the line fence. Aguilar was known for his muscles of steel, but he had also a pair of tight boots and was not much used to walking.

At first he bore it in proud silence, then complained, then whined, and at last broke down and wept with the terrible pain in his feet. But James Shane was merciless. Whenever he lagged or stumbled he tickled him up with a rawhide whip, sir, and made him go on in spite of everything.

But he finally had pity on El Toro's exhaustion and let him hang onto his stirrup for support, so that the general blessed his name in gratitude.

Even so when they stopped at the border he pitched forward onto his face in the sand and layed like he would never get up again.

Then James Shane removed the bomb out of his pants and after a time El Toro managed to get to his feet.

"I see a house over there," James Shane told him, "where you might get a chance to rest up and get something to eat. Trot along now, General. I'm glad to have met you."

With these words he unlocked the handcuffs and handed him a swift kick in the pants to start him on his way.

When Aguilar seen that he grabbed James Shane by the arm. "Say, are you crazy?" he hollered. "Maybe you don't know there is a great big reward out for that guy?"

"What of it? I told him I'd turn him loose when I was through with him."

"But I tell you he is worth big money, that son-of-a-gun," Aguilar insisted. "Let's you and me let bygones be bygones and collect it. What do you care what you told a robber like him?"

James Shane did not say nothing, but he turned around and hauled off and knocked Aguilar clean off his feet. And then he stood him up again and blackened both his eyes and caused him to lose several of them white teeth. And at last he took him by the shoulders and turned him around.

"That for you, Colonel," he said, and he handed him also a kick in the pants.

After that he mounted his horse and rode away.

But this Aguilar was a foxy guy. Listen, sir, to his craft.

When El Toro staggered away he managed to reach the house James Shane had showed him, and there a kind peon let him stay two or three days until he got strong and vigorous again. Then one dark night he borrowed the man's horse and rode back to his army. But in the meantime his brave boys had all got tired waiting for him and had gone their ways, so when El Toro seen that he didn't have no more army he thought he might as well do the same.

That ended the revolution, sir, but what did that son of a gun Aguilar do but write a long letter to his superior officer, telling how he had put down the insurrection and pacified the district. And they believed it, sir, and gave him a promotion and extra pay and a decoration.

But this James Shane was put in the hoosegow because he came back late from his furlough. What do you know about that, sir?

COUPS AND OTHER THINGS

by Frank H. Huston

THE practise of striking or counting coups originated with the Shiela—the Cheyenne Nation—and was adopted by their immediate neighbors only. The Eastern, Pacific Coast and the Gulf Indians did not count coups; indeed, they did not know what a coup was.

The Indian word, as near as it can be phonetically spelled, is "ckgau." It is a semi-guttural and has no relation or similarity with the word coup. The latter was given to the custom by the Canadian voyagers to the plains; it represents their attempts to pronounce the Indian word.

A coup could only be made in the heat of battle; it was made with a coup-stick, a whip, a lance, bow or ordinary switch and in no other way.

If in battle one struck an opponent and subsequently killed him, he "struck a coup." If, under similar conditions, a brave struck a teepee, it and its contents were his, similarly with a pony and so forth—but in each case the act must have taken place while fighting was going on.

The taking of a scalp, gaining a strategical or tactical advantage, the simple killing or capturing of an enemy could not be counted as coups.

It may not be amiss to state here that the "clan" system was wholly unknown among the Plains tribes. What are termed "clans," by those who should know better, were the Soldier or Warrior organizations. Their marks—rude drawings of a wolf, dog, coyote, panther, buffalo, etc.—were not clan symbols; they were a sort of regimental or lodge badge, like the button worn by a Mason or Odd Fellow, or the crossed sabers or rifles of the troops, or, even, the coat-of-arms of an organization.

The Dog Soldiers were not a degree, but were the police of the Nations, generally and usually the members of one degree, as for instance, the Dog degree of the Arapajas were not Dog Soldiers, the latter being of the Crooked Lance Degree exclusively—the same holding good among the other nations.

The word Nation is used advisedly, each nation or people being composed of tribes after the fashion of the ancient Jews. Among the Sioux were the Auk Papar Bruels, Minnetonkas, Aglallas, etc., all tribes of the one Dog—or Cakatoh people. With the Cheyenne we find eleven tribes—Anskowinis, Hinisis, Wetapin, Taniurv, Sutayaw, etc.—all tribes of the Shiela stock and people, the same being true of other nations. Symbols were but seldom found among the Plains tribes, the sign-language—notwithstanding many published statements to the contrary, being far from symbolic. Metaphor was common, but symbols were seldom found.

In reality, the sign-language was imitative description. The sign of "eat" or "food"—noticed by the writer among the Chinese, Filipinos, Kanakas, Mexicans, etc., being like many others, seemingly world-wide—and expressed the action of filling the mouth with the hand. To be sure, the sun was the symbol of the Grandfather, otherwise the Great Spirit, but was only so *spoken* of and not depicted as such either by drawings or the sign-language, which showed some salient striking part of the object to be described; as of a crow, the flopping wings; a snake, the sinuous motion of water, that which one drinks; the wolf by the pricked ears; the buffalo, and deer by their separate distinguishing horns. What more descriptive than "exterminated," "wiped out," rubbing the flat palms in circular motion ending with a sharp sweeping separation, sidewise. Note the child cleaning a slate in the good old, if vulgar, manner.

About the one and only symbol was the buffalo skull and that was used in a symbolic sense under certain conditions—as in the Sun Dance *hepass*, the *tribal* Medicine Lodge, etc.—but the meaning of it is as comprehensible to the general run of white people as the nebular hypothesis would be to a newly inducted adolescent of the Foxmen, or the meaning of the square and compass to the uninitiated.

Colors used in painting were symbolical. Black signifying joy; red, excitement, hilarity; green, burial when obtainable, the corpse being wrapped in a green blanket and "histed" to a tree-crotch.

MARSTON AND ME

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

By Thomson Burtis

Author of "Groody Among the Gushers," "The Lone Raider," etc.

LIFE on the border had hit a dry spell for some unknown reason. Not a —— thing had happened, was happening or seemed about to happen. For approximately four months the border patrolmen, of which, at times, I had the honor to be one, were slowly dying of dry-rot. We galloped up and down the frisky Rio Grande from Brownsville to San Diego, including waystations, with our customary eagerness to spot something of interest in connection with smuggling, rustling and other diversions of the Spigs and American renegades, but we were like a bunch of mosquitoes sucking on a piece of marble.

The McMullen flight, which I decorated with my lanky presence, was composed of youths like "Sleepy" Spears, "Tex" MacDowell and other flyers whose ideas of life do not include monotony as an ingredient of Paradise, and we were beginning to discuss the fact that the border was becoming really disgustingly effete. As Sleepy Spears put it in his slow drawl:

"The —— of it is that there's getting to be so —— much law down here they'll be sending delegations from Connecticut, Michigan and the Oneida Community to study Sheriff Bill Trowbridge's methods, and we might lose our jobs!"

All of which just goes to show that it is darkest just before you switch on the electric lights, and that it's a long worm which has no turning.

When the big news struck us we needed it, and I needed it most of all. It was the day after St. Patrick's day, and when I awakened to greet the morning after in Laredo I was sleeping in an alley, and alongside me was Lieutenant George Groody, at that time one of the leading lights of the American Air Service.

Groody had invited me, two days before, to participate in his annual celebration of St. Patrick's birthday.

"As an enemy of snakes," stated Groody, "Old Pat deserves the consideration of every true Irishman."

After the day was done I agreed, because I was on the verge of seeing a private collection of nice pink and blue ones myself. How was I to know that Groody invariably started St. Patrick's day in Mexico by ordering six gin fizzes set up in a row, and, starting with this little eye-opener, proceeding on to drinks adjacent? At midnight of the holiday we were drinking to Clemenceau, Lafayette and Garibaldi, having long before run out of dead flyers, movie stars and famous Irishmen.

Anyway, as I sent my De Haviland staggering on its way back to McMullen I was, temporarily, a prohibitionist, with particular reference to *tequila* and *mescal* and *aguadiente,* which are Mexican beverages guaranteed to grow hair on the top of Mt. Everest. Any one of the three will make a rabbit spit in a bulldog's face.

The airdome at McMullen is small, flat and hard to land on without over-running. I made it by a miracle, and as I stalked into headquarters I was greeted by a very perspicacious and inquiring look from the good eye of Cap Kennard, our genial flight commander.

"And did you enjoy yourself, 'Slim'?" he inquired, while "Pop" Cravath, our superannuated adjutant, laughed raucously.

"Temporarily," I admitted.

"Think you're going to bed now, put icebags on your head and tomatoes in your stomach, and convalesce?" pursued Kennard, his scarred face holding a peculiar expression.

He's been in twenty-three airplane wrecks, and what he did to the ships was as nothing to what he had done to his face.

Judging from photos of our stocky, chipper little C. O., he had joined the Air Service as a handsome young man with a face which could pass in a crowd on a dark night without sending any damsel into hysterics. After a couple of years in France and more time on the border, however, he looked as if he were breaking in a new pan for somebody else.

"What's up, Cap?" I demanded, being able to see through a ladder if some one lends me his glasses.

"The chief's got his bill through Congress, the bombing tests on those German battleships are going to take place this summer, and you, Slim, are ordered immediately to Langham Field, Virginia. You're going in advance of the picked flyers who'll drop the said bombs upon the bodies and persons of the *Ostfriesland* and other boats, and you've got to be out of here on the four o'clock train to San Antonio. Get under a cold shower, take some salts, drink a lot of icewater, pack the extra sock of yours, and may —— have mercy on your soul!"

II

ALL of which more or less accounts for the fact that I, Slim Evans in person, was ensconced on the edge of Chesapeake Bay three days later. Langham Field is in the commonwealth of Virginia with the bay bounding one edge of it. All around it on the other sides there are marshes and estuaries and swamps and puddles and so forth.

The mosquitoes have a formal review each night, and march and countermarch up and down any face within reach. Every once in a while there comes an order for them to take careful aim and fire. The first night I spent in the officers' barracks I had no screens on my windows, and the mosquitoes were so thick that when I started to throw my shirt in a corner it just hung right in the air.

Seriously speaking, I was in a very pleasant frame of mind at that, and I wouldn't be far wrong if I said that just about every other flyer in the service was in a similar mental condition. Granting, of course, that any man who flies for a living has any mind at all to be in any condition whatever.

The facts were that for weary months General Mallory, the chief, had been lifting his melodious voice to high heaven, Congress and the world at large, insisting that a bunch of airplanes flying out to sea with bombs aboard could considerably embarrass any navy approaching our shores. The fact that I was at Langham Field was simply due to the fact that Congress had finally taken a few dollars out of the appropriation for a new post office with a solid gold cupola for the town of Four Forks, Arkansas, and added it to the money which had been set aside to dredge the Yahee River in Mississippi and turned it over to the Air Service. The latter money was made available when the Yahee turned out to be a brook which had temporarily dried up.

The Air Service, I already knew, had developed a four thousand pound bomb, but the dope was that for the tests mere peas, as it were, weighing only two thousand pounds, would be used. It was the general's contention, which seemed to the naked eye to be well-founded, that a few of these eggs, each with a yolk consisting of a thousand pounds of T. N. T., when laid alongside a battleship might embarrass it a trifle.

In fact, he had an idea that said monarch of the seas might become extinct almost immediately. It meant plenty for the Air Service if they could prove that they could fly a hundred miles or so out to sea and bother a navy. And when one gets down to hardpan, every flyer I ever knew has a certain pride in his corps which is seldom equaled and never surpassed in any organization I know, from the Independent Order of Odd Fellows to the Queen's Own Royal Mounted Sussex Fusileers, which organization acts as bodyguard to the Prince of Wales, I understand, and have heavy casulaties daily as men die of heart-failure, trying to follow him around.

I had but vague ideas of just what the plans were, and least of all as to why I had been ordered on ahead, until I reported to Major Lamb Johnson next morning. Major Lamb Johnson is a fox-faced little fellow with a spike mustache consisting of five hairs on one side and four on the other. He has a habit of blowing frequently with a loud report, and when he comes down to earth again the second lieutenants can be found fainting on the ground all around him.

He was striding up and down his office when I entered. From the windows of it I could see the long line of huge, corrugated iron hangars which bounded the southern edge of the field, and the one huge dirigible hangar on the northern side. Eastward was Chesapeake Bay, and on the western boundary were a few more hangars and some frame administration buildings.

"Come in Evans," stated the Major. "You are here a month and a half before the hundred-odd picked veterans of the service arrive to commence practising for the bombing tests. The reason for your orders is that we want you as a ferry pilot. Your job will be to commute between here and Cleveland, Ohio, where the Martin factory is located, flying a new twin-motored Martin bomber to Langham each trip. Have you ever flown one?"

I shook my head.

"We have two on the field now, and Captain Lawton will teach you. You had a lot of big ship experience in France, I believe, and you also were officer-in-charge of ferrying three tankwings from Long Island to Texas a year or so ago, were you not?"

I agreed to this without reservation.

"The bigship squadron will be the 114th to which you'll be assigned immediately. Captain Lawton in command. It's just a skeleton squadron until the other flyers arrive, of course. Report to him immediately. Just one thing more Evans."

I knew something was coming. Major Lamb was always full of good advice and uplifting thoughts.

"I have never served in the same outfit with you. However, your reputation is that of a flyer who gets where he's going by hook or crook, but that as an officer you are somewhat lax and careless. We are face to face with the biggest opportunity the service has ever had. Every man must put his shoulder to the wheel and live, think and breathe nothing but these tests, working twenty-four hours a day if necessary and——"

He went on with his discourse for some five minutes for the good of my soul and the glory of ——. At the end I expected that he'd lead in prayer for my unregenerate soul or something. Finally I got out after agreeing piously with everything he'd said and resolving to lead a better life.

Then I hied me up to the ten big hangars which were to house the 114th, and found old Cap Lawton, who's three inches over six feet and hence only a couple of inches shorter than I. In lankiness we are about alike, but whereas his feet are bigger than mine, my nose makes his seem like merely a microscopic growth in the middle of his thin face.

I knew him well, and he greeted me with a broad smile as he shook hands. After fanning a while I found out that my teammate in trips from Cleveland to Langham would be Les Fernald. We'd ferry two ships at a time.

"You'll be in command of Flight Three of the squadron, Slim, after the ships get here and the boys come in. At present that flight's got one sergeant first class in charge, and two mechanics. Later it'll have four sergeants, meaning one crew chief apiece for the ships, and eight mechanics. Your flight sergeant is Marston, a good man, although peculiar. Better stroll down and get acquainted with him, eh? You'll probably use him as mechanic on these trips of yours."

I strolled down to hangar fourteen which, it seemed, was to house the ships of Flight Three for the summer, and heard voices from the little tool room partitioned off in one corner of said iron structure. There wasn't a ship in the flight, of course, so the mechanics were about as busy as so many Congressmen.

As I approached the door there cut through the murmur of talk a loud, vulgar voice, heavy as lead, deep as the guile of the heathen Chinee and rough as a Texas boulevard. Unless I was badly mistaken, those vocal cords belonged to nobody but Major George William Marston, and Georgy stood about as high in my estimation as a rattlesnake, and that's right on the ground.

I wondered what in —— he was doing at Langham Field. I hadn't heard his name mentioned. It made the summer prospect look very dark, not to say drear. Add George William to a field which Lamb Johnson was already cluttering up with his presence, and you've got a madhouse made to order for any godly young flyer.

George William had been only a first lieutenant when I was one of the scared, diffident young cadets whose lives were made miserable because they stood in constant threat of discharge, and discharge meant that the dream of a lifetime, to fly, was shattered as completely as a glass dropped off the top floor of the Woolworth building.

George William had been in charge of the cross-country stage, and he did his —— to get me kicked out because I was an hour late on making Seguin, the town I was bound for on my first cross-country trip. I got lost—sure. But I found my course again and I got there.

He disliked me primarily because I am physically, mentally and spiritually unable to feel as if any man who ranks me is automatically first assistant to ——, and one day when he called me a fighting name I took the opportunity to interview him alone and notify him sincerely that the next time he got personal with me I'd endeavor earnestly to hang his nose approximately under his left ear and do a quick job of rough and ready plastic surgery on his entire face.

He had been an old army sergeant, and he was a twenty-minute egg with a yolk made of gall and wormwood and an idea that saluting and saying "sir" were the ends and objects of a cadet's existence.

In a group of kiwis—the kiwi is a mythical Australian bird which has wings but can't fly—who were jealous of flyers and made their lives miserable, he was the *non plus ultra*, the *sine qua non* and likewise anything else which you can think of abutting closely on a total loss.

Well, I had become a full-fledged officer since then, so I ambled in that little tool room. There were two privates sitting there, and a sergeant. And the sarge was none other than my old friend, George William Marston!

I shouldn't be surprized if I swayed lightly on my feet—a mere suggestion of being knocked slightly off my pins. There he was, same as before—fleshy, dark face, pop eyes of light blue, three creases between his brows and deep-cut lines through the fat around his mouth. He looked more sullen than ever, and his black hair was much thinner.

If I was knocked for a row of Abyssinian applejack barrels, he was at least three laps ahead of me. Just as an ungodly feeling of joy and well-being went frolicking through my hardening arteries, his mouth was working spasmodically in an endeavor to say something. He had leaped to his feet like a shot, the other two being a split-second behind him, and he stood there as stiff as I was at my first Fireman's Grand Supper Entertainment and Ball back in Utah, where I originated.

"Rest!" I grinned, as the two soldiers relaxed.

But not Marston. He was unable to do anything momentarily.

In a flash I grasped the explanation. Marston had been made an officer from a sergeant during the war, and undoubtedly, when the regular army was formed from the temporary troops, he had been unable to pass the exams on such military matters as Latin, English literature and the biennial theorem. Consequently he, like many others, went back to his former grade.

"So you're a sergeant now, and you're to be my flight sergeant all summer!" I observed pleasantly.

HOW I was going to pay him back for days of mental agony was making a new man of me as I stood and looked at him. You may, brethren, give vent to several loud, uncultivated snorts at the idea of me being in mental agony about anything. To tell the truth, I figured when I was a cadet that the country might struggle along without me in the flying corps, and I didn't give three whoops in hallelujah whether or not I was an officer.

But I did want to fly, and I wanted to get to France, and I didn't care whether or not I was carrying gold bars on my shoulders or a corporal's stripes on my sleeve. Any man who wanted to be an officer could go to a training camp and get the commission in three months. It took a lucky flyer six months and a few broken bones to get his.

Any man who became a flying cadet had his mind set on flying, and George William Marston was the nastiest, meanest obstacle in the way I had ever come across. He gave an order in a way that made it sound like an insult. And he seemed to take delight in rubbing our noses, particularly mine, in the dirt and then trying to discharge us if we objected to the smell. Of course, my nose was unduly prominent. Gents, he sure rode me into the ground.

"I'll be your flight commander all summer," I told the congregation. "You can go now—you two. I want to converse in private with Sergeant Marston."

The two privates filed out silently. Marston was still standing as if concrete had set in his backbone.

"Sit down, Major," I told him, and I'll swear the "Major" just slipped out naturally.

He relaxed, but did not subside on the tool chest next to him. His eyes, which popped out so far they could have been knocked off with a stick, met mine steadily. We had instinctively hated each other, I think, from the first time we met.

"Well, this is a rather peculiar situation, Marston," I told him as I ignited a cheroot. "The man that tried to break me is now under me."

"And about to be broken himself," Marston interrupted me.

His face seemed to me to have changed since the time I had seen him before. He looked as if he'd gone through —— and had become a sullen enemy of life in general. His light blue eyes, staring into mine, were glowing dully. He seemed to be daring me to do my worst as he looked at me.

And all of a sudden I hated myself because I had even considered using my strategic position to get back at him for what he had done to me.

"No, you're not going to be broken, Marston," I told him as he stood there like a lion at bay.

He simply looked at me, without saying a word. My particular and peculiar type of beauty did not appeal to him at all, and as for him, I didn't like anything about him and never had. In a personal sense, I mean.

"You can make my life a —— on earth, of course," he said after a lengthy silence. His voice had a deep husk in it.

"Sure," I agreed. "Listen, Marston. You always were a good soldier, as far as I know; leaned over backward to live up to regulations, and a hound on discipline. But you were without exception the rottenest officer I ever saw, and the nastiest and most unfair man a poor cadet ever had over him. You were enough all by yourself to ruin the morale of every cadet at Donovan Field. You'll make a —— sight better sergeant than you did an officer."

"And you were about the funniest sample of a soldier that any army, including the Mexican, ever had," he told me doggedly, and in his brooding light eyes that glow burned brighter. "You came lounging in as though you didn't give a —— for any orders or discipline whatever, and tried to do just what you —— pleased. And you're no more an army man right now than you were before.

"Oh, I've heard plenty about you. You've pulled off a few good flying stunts, but you're not a soldier and never will be. And by —— if you think I'm going to lick your boots because you, a young squirt who never had any responsibility about him is an officer and I'm only a sergeant ——"

"Pull in your neck, Marston; you're stretching it," I advised him. "You'd better thank your lucky stars that I'm not going to try to get even with you for what you put me through. I'm a flyer now, but I can still look back at the months when I was bound up in the effort to get to be a flyer, and the stuff you put me through.

"But Marston, I'm going to relieve the spleen that's gathered in my system. As long as you're under me you soldier as you never did before. I'll show you no favors, but I'll not pick on you until you slip. Then you're going to get it right in the neck. Meanwhile, Marston, do you remember the day just before inspection when you dressed me down in front of the troops, and called me a nice, pretty name which cast certain aspersions on my ancestry?"

He stood there and said nothing, but the ferocious gleam in his eyes said plenty. No doubt he had brooded for years after slipping back from the grade of major to that of sergeant. Some drop, I'll say.

"We're quiet and alone, Marston. Temporarily I'm taking off these pretty little collar ornaments, and forgetting that I'm a looey in this man's army. And I'm going to beat you half to death, —— willing, as between man and man. And whoever wins, we'll walk out of here and the past'll be forgotten as long as you're a soldier."

He hesitated briefly.

"If I beat you up, Evans, I'll pay through the nose for it. You've got all summer to pay me up for a fight, and you'll do it. I can't win."

"You button up your mouth, Marston," I told him grimly. "Don't judge me or any other man by your own standards. I don't even want to kid myself by pretending that I could ride you all summer for personal reasons and then excuse myself by saying that you need discipline. I wouldn't be that low, but that's what you did. Get that shirt off, if you want to, and put up your hands. The personal representative of several thousand cadets whose lives you made miserable, including several dozen that you got kicked out entirely, is standing right in front of you."

"And is going to get the beating of his life!" bellowed Marston suddenly.

HE TORE off his O. D. shirt as if possessed. All the accumulated bitterness of the last couple of years, I imagine, added to the natural meanness in him, broke through the dam and turned him into a fighting fool.

He weighed as much as I did, but I was a foot taller and my reach was many inches greater than his. As he came toward me joyfully he sent his powerful, stocky body at me like a cannon ball. I sidestepped, and got in a peach right to the button.

It is not my intention to give a round-by-round story of the battle. I couldn't. It was too fast and much too furious. We were fighting, remember, in a little toolroom, impeded by toolchests, and with rows of shelves around the walls filled with wrenches, cotter pins and all sorts of spare parts. I didn't have room enough to dance around and keep him out of reach, and he took blow after blow in order to get into very close quarters.

I floored him in the first ten seconds, but he was back on his feet as if he'd bounced off the floor. Once again he came hurtling in, and again I dropped him. His nose was bleeding profusely, not to say fluently by that time, but he was strong as a bull. The next time in he ducked a hurried right swing which I started from the floor, and the next instant we went crashing against the shelves. With a powerful heave he threw me to the floor, and for about a half minute we fought like wildcats all over the place. He used his feet, too, but luckily I got out of his gorilla-like grip in time and up to my feet.

The next minute or so is just a crimson-tinted haze as far as I'm concerned. We stood toe to toe and swapped blows. Twice he got me to the floor again, and in a brief interval when I kept him away from me, I floored him once more.

He came up more slowly, and I leaped in with a one-two punch that I traded for a trip-hammer swing that caught me just under the ear. I went spinning against a tool chest, and fell over it with a crash just as he dropped himself. I was dazed, dizzy, and somewhat, if not entirely, *non compos mentis* for a moment.

As I tried to clear my head and get to my feet I saw him getting up groggily. Before I could get further than my knees he hurled himself across that tool chest and on top of me, his huge fingers clutching blindly for my throat.

I felt as if I were fighting in a dream, and for my life or something. What brought me to, paradoxically enough, was a glancing blow from a light wrench. In a second my mind snapped to attention, and for a moment I was a strong man as I saw myself knocked out with a piece of iron. He had evidently grabbed the wrench from one of the shelves as I fell over the chest.

With feet and fists flying so fast they must have looked like a spinning pinwheel, I threw him off, and staggered to my feet. I gave him no quarter. He had trouble getting up for a minute. I had one of his eyes closed and his head was none too clear. He hadn't got across the tool chest before I socked him a beauty, and he went crashing against the shelves.

Staggering and dizzy as I was, I had enough left. His hands dropped helplessly, and I lifted him about two inches off the floor and deposited him four feet away and flat on his back with a roundhouse swing. Between measuring, getting my arm back and smacking him he had time enough to light a cigaret and smoke it, but he was too weak and blind and dazed and whatever else a man is when he's out on his feet, even to block it. Maybe he didn't see it. Anyway, he saw stars a minute later.

He lay on the floor, unable to move but not mentally out. I parked myself on a tool chest, and devoted my exclusive attention to inhaling large gobs of air into my laboring lungs. No use of talking, I was getting soft at that period. A little scrap got me gasping like Paul Revere's horse.

Finally I was able to light a cigaret, and as its soothing flavor was beginning to permeate the stuffy air of the tool room my dear friend Marston rose on his hind legs and peered at me through one good eye which, it appeared to me, needed the ministrations of some good raw steak to save him from becoming temporarily blind.

"Now that I've relieved myself, I feel better," I informed him.

"Didn't think you had it in you," he barked, his ordinarily husky voice deeper than usual. "I thought you lacked a punch—in anything."

"Your opinion of me was low in all particulars," I grinned. "As for me, I thought that when your bars were gone you had nothing left."

"Well, you licked me," he stated, hate peering forth from the one slit in his face which remained of two eyes. "And I s'pose this is just the start of what I'll go through. You——"

"Shut up, —— you!" I snapped. "That's about the last time you'll insinuate that I'm as low as you were when you had a commission, or I'll put you out of your misery *pronto* and all you'll have to worry about is whether you fry in —— or merely stew."

He said nothing, but applied a dirty handkerchief tenderly to his nose. The wrinkles between his black, bushy brows were deeper than ever, and his face was so sullen it was black.

"One thing more I desire to converse with you about, Marston," I went on after my temper was in control. "Captain Lawton implied to me that you were a good mechanic."

"You're —— right, I'm a good mechanic."

"My job is to ferry Martin Bombers from Cleveland to Langham for the next month. Want to be my mechanic? I'm not asking you for the pleasure of your company, you may be sure, but you're supposed to be the best motor man in the squadron."

"And being under you or with you isn't no pleasant prospect for me," he told me, stubborn and unafraid. "But I go where I'm ordered."

"You'll make some extra dough out of your travel allowance, you may enjoy the trip, and there are about two hundred mechanics on the field would give their shirts to go," I told him. "Likewise, I hate to take you worse than poison. But you're the best man, and you can just paste it in your hat that you're having the first illustration of the fact that you'll get a square deal around here when I say that you'll be ordered to go along."

He grunted, squinting up at me balefully.

"Another thing, Marston," I told him as I got up to go. "We've laid aside rank and that stuff for a while. But remember, now that our personal affairs are adjusted, that I'm wearing a commission and you're a sergeant. Say 'sir' to me, Marston, and don't ever presume to forget that you're a soldier and I'm an officer."

He laughed—a raucous series of cachinnations which had often impinged against my eardrums unpleasantly.

"You talkin' to me about bein' a soldier. Very well, sir!"

"Our travel orders should be out in a day or two. Be ready."

"Yes, sir."

"Go over to the hospital, get those shiners fixed up, report back and we'll go over the tools and other junk of the flight."

"Yes, sir."

And that was that. I told Lawton I'd take Marston for mechanic, and next day travel orders for Lieutenants Evans and Fernald, and Sergeants Marston and Bailey arrived in our respective boxes. The evening of the second day following Fernald and I met our non-coms at the Martin factory in Cleveland for a looksee at the ships.

III

YOU'VE probably heard of Les Fernald. He was on the round-the-world flight. He was a powerful, well-built chap of medium height with a pair of steady eyes, a nice smile, and the ability to fly a big ship about as well as it is given to man or beast to do anything. He'd had a lot of experience on Martins, whereas I only had a test flight with Lawton before I left. But I'd had some Caproni flying over in dear old France on some of my days away from Paris, and I'd lumbered through the ozone between Long Island and Texas with a three-motored Tankwing under me.

Out at the factory late that afternoon the two mechanics and ourselves inspected the ships, and then Fernald and I flew them on a test flight. They ticked away like clocks, and were perfectly rigged. I took Marston along on the flight, and he nodded his satisfaction to me at the same time that his rainbow-hued eyes glowed his dislike into my own.

We landed again on the private flying field of the factory and announced that we'd leave early next morning. So saying, we hied ourselves down to a hostelry while the mechanics got the ships gassed, oiled and ready to ramble. They were to be stabled for the night in a canvas hangar at the edge of the factory flying field.

At our early breakfast next morning a headline caught my eye, and as a result a scalding gulp of coffee went down the wrong tunnel. The java ended up in my right lung, I think, and I coughed enough to make the citizens of Cleveland think the lake breeze had become very strong all of a sudden.

"Listen, Les," I said at length, wiping the tears from my eyes. " 'HANGAR ON MARTIN FLYING FIELD BURNED. Two Martin Bombers, VALUED AT $100,000, COMPLETELY DESTROYED.' "

If you told Les Fernald that the continent of Europe had sunk into the sea, and that North America was expected to follow it into the briny deep, he'd probably say:

"Well, let's improve the time we've got left and see a good show, or have a drink or something."

So the rise I got out of him was:

"Read on, Slim. You interest me."

The story, peeled down to the core, was simply that the two ships we were to fly to Langham that day had been burned up, that no one could figure how the fire had started, and that the entire factory had been in great danger of ignition, so to speak. Only herculean efforts had saved it. Three fires, at different points, had been discovered before they got burning merrily enough to be out of control.

We cantered out to the factory without delay, and found a very mystified bunch of men, from the G. M. down. The only possible explanation they had for it was that a group of ten workmen had been fired a few weeks after the discovery that they were grafting, and that possibly they had started the conflagration to get revenge. We wired Washington, and were ordered to stay in Cleveland a few days until the next two Martins were ready. The factory schedule on the army contract was four ships a week.

Marston poked around in his sullen, scowling way, and when I ran across him out at the excited factory I inquired casually:

"Did you happen to see the fire? We were in bed early and never knew it until this morning."

"No, sir. I was in bed before midnight."

Which proved to be an unadulterated lie. Fifteen minutes later I overheard Bailey—this was out at the factory—say to Marston—

"Well, did you tear the town loose last night?"

"Nah—nothing doing," rasped Marston in return.

There was nothing for us to do at the factory—they were all running around ragged out there anyway—so as we left it I herded Bailey to one side. Marston had left by himself, but I wanted the conversation to be private.

"Marston living with you?" I asked him

"Yes, sir," said the slim young Bailey.

"He was out late last night, was he?"

"Yes, sir. About three A. M."

"I see. Just wanted to know. Come in drunk?"

Bailey was troubled. He didn't want to tell tales, I could see. So I went on:

"Don't be scared to tell me. I just don't want Marston to be in bad shape for the trip."

"He wasn't, sir. He'd been drinking, but he wasn't drunk."

"Thanks. That's all."

I wondered why George William had lied about being in bed early. It was a senseless thing to do. Not that I connected him with the fire at all, of course. But I was just curious. He went around with a chip balanced precariously on his shoulder all the time, that was sure, and seemed to crave no company of any kind whatever. The only reason he lived with Bailey at all, I presume, was to save money.

It worried me a little, taking it by and large. Finally, as we reached our palatial suite of two rooms and connecting bath in the most ornate hostelry in Cleveland, I put it up to Fernald. He knew the history of Marston and me.

"Why do you suppose he lied?" I asked him.

"Probably thought it was none of your business where he was last night," Fernald grinned.

"In which assumption," I admitted, "he would be entirely correct. But, the question once asked, there was no reason——"

"Except that he is as fond of you as a bull is of a red kimono," Les reminded me. "Well, let's step out and see the town."

DURING the ensuing three days we saw plenty of it, and finally went through the procedure of inspecting and testing two more Martins. By this time the Martin factory was under heavy guard. The Martins being vitally important—in fact, indispensable—for the conduct of the bombing tests, the company was under a heavy forfeit clause in the contract for twenty thereof, and the mere idea that there was dirty work at the cross-roads struck them with panic.

Detectives were rounding up the discharged and discredited employees little by little and each by each. So far no confession had been third-degreed out of the men. The first lot all had alibis.

Believe me, though, we inspected the ships from stem to stern and from rudder to nose again the next morning before we started on our way. Our route lay over the flat Ohio fields, almost due south to McCook Field at Dayton. There we gassed up, and set sail eastward to Boundville, which is a West Virginia village right on the bank of the Ohio River in that little slivver of West Virginia which hides coyly between Ohio and Pennsylvania. At Boundville the government maintains a little way-station on the Washington-Dayton airway. It's just a field with a few spare parts and some gas and oil available.

It was a nice trip.

In case you don't know a Martin, let me elucidate a bit for thee. The ship weighs four tons, and has about seventy feet of wingspread. On each wing, just far enough from the cockpit to allow the propellers to whirl without hitting anything, a Liberty motor is set in a maze of huge, trunklike struts which hold it up and in and down; in fact, keep it safely anchored.

The pilot's cockpit, with two seats side by side in it, is set a bit forward of the wings, about on a line with the two propellers in front of the motors. Ahead of the pilot's cockpit, in the very nose of the ship, is an observer's cockpit, equipped with bomb-sights, glass in the flooring to look down through, bomb releases, and about a thousand other things with technical names as long as your arm, or even as long as mine, which is considerably lengthy.

Directly in back of the pilot's cockpit, in the fore part of the huge fuselage, is the hollow bomb compartment, with bomb racks which can carry two tons of bombs, ranging from a swarm of little twenty-five pounders up through three hundreds, six hundreds, two one-thousand pounders or one two-thousand baby.

In back of this compartment, about half way to the tail surfaces, there is a cockpit for the mechanic or radio operator. The tail surfaces consist of elevators, vertical fin and stabilizer, each very large, but otherwise the same as in any ship, and it has two big rudders, both worked by the same rudder bar.

Les and I, like fleas on elephants' backs, set our course from Dayton to a bit south of the airline to make sure. When we sighted the wide, sluggish-looking Ohio we simply flew up the stream until the field at Boundville came in sight.

It's somewhat of a trick to land a Martin, because you've got two motors to handle, the ship is so heavy that it settles rapidly, and the pilot's cockpit is about ten feet above the ground. That makes leveling off a foot above the ground a bit difficult, at first. I made it the first try by bull luck in that small field, and Les did it with nonchalant ease, of course.

Marston had been riding alongside me the whole trip looking straight ahead and not vouchsafing me so much as a look, either dirty or otherwise. He and I exchanged as few words as the law allowed. The cars from town commenced to arrive immediately, of course, to look over the huge ships which were so awe-inspiring compared to the De Havilands the townspeople were accustomed to. There was one lonesome soldier in charge of the gas and oil.

We were to spend the night there, there being no wild rush. We taxied the ships up to the line in front of the gas shack, turned them around, and climbed out after running out the motors.

"Both of you stay here until the ships are gassed and oiled, and until dark, when the people quit coming," I told them. "This trip you, Marston, will spend the night out here on guard, and next trip Bailey can take it. That suit you, Les?"

"Sure," returned that young gentlemen. "At that, Bailey, I'd advise you to stay out here rather than in the one hotel down there. It's name ought to be the 'Bedbug's Roost,' and it has the first collection of bowls and pitchers and other sanitary bric-à-brac I've seen since the hogs ate my brother."

Bailey, one of the clean-looking, bright youngsters who came into the army during the war and stayed, grinned and allowed that he'd try it. Les and I accepted a ride into town with our baggage after I'd made arrangements with the soldier on duty to supply Marston with blankets. George William set to work bleakly, not uttering so much as a word. He would be out there all alone, because the field guard's duty did not include night work.

We saw a wild western movie called "Temptations of the Flesh," fought off curious questioners the whole length of the one street, and retired early because there was nothing else to do. It was the sort of a town I'd like to come to after a month of ribaldry, to settle down for a week or two and do nothing but drink Pluto and watch the sun go down.

Our start was planned for seven o'clock, and we were out there right on time. We wanted to cross the towering Cumberlands of West Virginia early, before it got hot and the cañons and rivers and woods and rocks made the air too bumpy.

Early as we were, however, a parade of cars followed us out. The residents of Boundville considered eleven A. M. the middle of the night, and four was the fashionable breakfast hour. As our Ford bumped into the field, leading a miscellaneous collection of vehicles, I spotted Marston reclining in his blankets under a wing.

That made me pretty sore. He knew the hour we were to start, and we had sent a man out to him with a vacuum bottle full of coffee and half a dozen buttered rolls for his breakfast. The messenger was standing alongside his car, smoking a cigaret.

I galloped over to George William, followed in order by Les and Bailey. Marston should have had the canvas covers off motors and cockpits, and everything ready for the warmup.

"Sorry to disturb your rest, Marston," I told him as we came within a few feet of him. "It's a shame to get you up before noon, but you can get your beauty sleep back at Langham."

By that time I was right over him, and as I looked down at him I saw that his face was a curious greenish color. His eyes glared up into mine with that non-stop hatred in them. Then, without a word, he staggered to his feet and over to one side of the field, where he had what looked like a paroxysm of coughing; apparently trying to vomit, but couldn't. Then he walked back to us, and seemed to be all right, temporarily.

"Sick?" I asked him, while curious onlookers gathered close.

"Get back where you belong!" yelled Les, and herded them away.

"I never was sicker in my life," stated Marston, mumbling his words.

"Any idea what made you so?"

"No, sir. Late last night a couple of fellows came out and gabbed a while, and finally went to town and got some sandwiches and coffee and we ate 'em. They beat it away, and I went to sleep a while and woke up sick as a dog. And I've been sick ever since."

"Haven't been drinking any of this moonshine?"

"No," he barked savagely, as if I was inferring that he was responsible for the war or something.

"Well, are you up to the trip?"

"Sure."

"The —— he is," stated Fernald. "He'd better find a doctor and lay up here a few days and meet us in Cleveland again for the next trip. "He's as green as a drafted mountaineer, and——"

He was interrupted by another paroxysm on the part of George William. It was horrible to see his body wracked and wrenched around, without relieving the terrible nausea.

"Climb in one of those cars and get to a doctor as soon as we leave," I told him. "The next Martins'll be ready in five days. Meet us in Cleveland then."

He made no answer, but walked weakly over to the side of the field, and sat there numbly. Bailey primed both motors, and then Les in his ship and I in mine pressed the self-starter buttons, and soon the four great Libertys were roaring a diapason of power. I watched the maze of instruments—just double as many as in a single-motored ship, of course—and then idled my left motor while I gave the right one full gun, tried it on either switch of the double-ignition system, and listened carefully.

Everything was sweet as a nut, and the same procedure was gone through with the other motor. My ship was r'arin' to go, and so was Fernald's. The field guard pulled the blocks and tossed them into the rear cockpit, and I turned my ship on a dime by using only the left-hand motor, which pulled the ship around to the right. Then I followed Fernald's huge Martin, like a house on wheels, up the field for the take-off.

THE field lay practically east and west, and the western edge went right to the edge of the river. The wind was from the west. There was a screen of trees and undergrowth between the edge and the Ohio, the tops of the trees some fifteen feet above the level of the field. The growth was on the banks of the river, which sloped down from the field to the water.

As I was turning for the take-off Les, with Bailey beside him, gave his ship the guns. It roared away across the field, and in a moment his steady pressure on the wheel had the tail up. I waited, in order to give the air, which would be badly scrambled by the wash of two propellers, a chance to clear a bit. I set my goggles, jazzed each motor a bit, and shoved the two throttles all the way on just as Les left the ground.

In a Martin there is no obstruction to your view, the motors being to each side of you. It took all my strength, pushing against the wheel, to get the tail up. As my big bomber picked up speed Les was circling over the river.

Then two things happened simultaneously. I heard a wild mixture of yells, screams and shrieks from the cars drawn up on the edges of the field at the same moment that the tail of my ship hit the ground again with a terrific crunch and the wheel under my hands suddenly became free, as easily movable as if it was attached to nothing whatever. I took a split-second to look up, and saw Fernald's Martin, in a half-spin, drop below the edge of the trees. The next second a reversed Niagara of water rose above the foliage.

My brain, none too hardy an instrument at best, was literally as numb as a piece of sausage. But I could not think of Les then. My elevators were no more—that was why the wheel had become free in my hand and the tail back on the ground. I was within a hundred feet of the trees, traveling at more than fifty miles an hour, with no chance of taking off. In a flash my hand dropped to the throttles. By cutting one, the other motor would drag the ship around, probably wrecking a wing, but saving me.

Even as I did so, I knew I could not do it. For those —— cars had lined each edge of the field, and my ship would probably plow through them, killing every fool spectator in the bunch.

There was nothing to do but let it go straight ahead. It was slowing up, but four tons which has been going close to sixty miles an hour can't stop as quick as a motorless Ford going up Pike's Peak when the brakes are applied. As inevitably as fate itself, I was trundling swiftly toward those trees, with only a frail cockpit between myself and them, and two props to hem me in and keep me from jumping.

I cut the switches fifty feet from the trees. Up went my goggles, and off went my belt. I got to my feet on the seat the second before the ship plunged over the embankment. The trees were ten feet ahead. As it crashed over the lip of the field toward them I crouched, and leaped like a kangaroo. And by the seven thousand sweethearts of King Solomon I got my hands around a limb that swayed underneath me, and there I clung, like a monkey by its tail, thirty feet above the base of the tree.

Had I gone down with the ship all that would have remained of Slim Evans would have been an over-sized pancake. The four-ton ship crashed against the sturdy trees, and the observer's cockpit crumpled like an eggshell. The trees swept half through both wings, and at the finish one great oak was the exclusive occupant of the cockpit which had once been mine. I'd have been wrapped around it in loving embrace, never to leave it until they scraped me off.

I scrambled on this swaying reed of a limb, and worked my way back toward the trunk of the tree. I had no time for the fainting, screaming, yelling and generally hysterical bunch of nitwits on the field, but safe in a crotch of the tree gazed down upon the river. There was Fernald's Martin, half-submerged, and on the upflung tail was Mr. Fernald himself, accompanied by Mr. Bailey.

I was so relieved I let out a loud yelp. If I could talk as loud as that habitually we wouldn't have had to wire Washington at all.

Fernald, squatting like a frog on a lily pad, waved airily to me, clinging pensively to my perch in a tree.

"Don't mind if I leave this here for a while, do you Slim?" he inquired in his placid way. "Hurt?"

"Nope. How about you?"

"Bailey's got a broken rib, or maybe two or three or four," yelled Fernald. "Otherwise all present and accounted for. Looks to me as though there was dirty work along the river."

"I'll see about a boat for you," I told him, and started to climb down the tree toward the surging mob beneath me.

I oiled up the mental machinery and had it whirring away at a great rate before I got down. While still ten feet up I gave orders.

"Get back on the field and stay there," I told the crowd. "And I mean it. Beat it—fast! All but Marston! Wait a minute. Who's got a boat or knows of one?"

"I—I got one!" stuttered one red-faced man with a gray mustache of the vintage of 1850.

"Get at it quick?"

"Y-Yes."

"Get it and get out after the two men on the river—quick! Rest of you back on the field."

They obeyed *pronto*, talking to each other continuously and with no one listening to anybody else. I had a sort of a kind of a plan of procedure staked out by the time I got down and faced the scaredest, whitest, most shaken-up sergeant in the American or any other army.

"You're sicker now, I presume," I told him grimly.

Marston could not speak. His tongue seemed stuck to the roof of his mouth, and he was a truly pitiful sight, I suppose, had I had room for any pity in my mind.

I was about to launch forth on something, when one of the occasional sensible ideas I get seized the opportunity to make itself known to me. So I folded up my tongue and said curtly:

"My elevator controls went bad on the take-off. Looks to me like Fernald's went bad in the air, and it was just the grace of —— he was over the water, and only a few feet high. Help me with this fuselage."

Marston, as I said, was like a man in a trance. His weakness seemed to have been effectually scared out of him, and he didn't try to vomit once. Which gave me pause for thought, in itself. *He* hadn't been in my ship.

WE LOOKED at the elevators, which were absolutely undamaged. The control wires were attached to the little cabane struts above and below the great linen fins—but they hung loosely. Then I broke through the fuselage carefully, so that patching would be all that was necessary to repair it, and took a look inside. The tail-control cables go through the fuselage, and are not visible from the outside except at either end.

In a very few minutes the evidence was all before me. The cables had been filed inside. Not completely through, but nearly. The object was clear. The few unfiled strands of the cables were sufficiently strong to hold and work the elevators when the ship was on the ground. But when it picked up speed, and one commenced to use the things with all the force of the propeller blast, plus the speed of the ship, acting against the surfaces, the cable was not strong enough to hold.

I had been lucky, in a way, in that mine had been filed a bit too much and had broken before I was going at full speed. Les' had given way over the river. It was my guess that the perpetrator of the thing had hoped that the cables would hold for a while, and give way during the trip some time when the ship was going at an unusually fast pace, getting underneath a cloud or something like that. It didn't seem likely that he or they would want the wrecks to happen on the field.

Marston saw it, and he was a broken man. For a moment, that is. My eyes must have shown what was in my mind as they finally met his. He straightened like a shot, and his sullen, strained face suddenly flushed as red as fire. He stood there, daring me to say something, and hating me worse than ever because of what had happened. And as I stood there I was utterly convinced that I was looking at as low and rotten a murderer as one would meet in a tour of the United States, where most of the murderers are.

But I held my tongue, except to say—

"Sick or no sick, you're going in a boat with me and we'll look over Fernald's ship."

He didn't say ah, yes, or no; didn't expostulate, explain or try to clear himself. With a baleful glare in his eyes and a shadow on his heavy face he went with me in a Ford, driven by a kid who tried to break all speed records, and we got a boat a half mile away.

We met Fernald's party on the way. Fernald transfered to my flat-bottomed dreadnaught, while Bailey went on toward shore. The boy was white and sick, the freckles standing out on his face as if one was looking at them through a stereoscope. I just asked one question—

"Did you inspect these ships from tail to nose last night?"

"Yes, sir!" yelled Bailey, his eyes like those of a madman.

Then they sought Marston's and so did Fernald's, only Les was calmly curious and appraising, where the overwrought youngster was half insane.

"Beat it on, Bailey, and don't talk a word," I told him.

I told Les what I'd found. Marston brooded in one end of the boat while the Boundville veteran, rowing us, bent to his work and asked one question after another which never got answered.

Well, exactly the same things had been done to Fernald's ship as to mine.

"We'll talk when we get back," I told him, jerking my head toward Marston.

George William caught the gesture. A wild, leaping fire flamed in his eyes, and a shaking paw was extended toward me.

"I know what you'll do!" he snarled. "You've got me now, and you'll railroad me to Leavenworth, —— you!"

"Shut up, Marston!" I snapped. "Remember who you're talking to!"

There was a second of tension in that boat which was enough to make one's flesh crawl. Marston, his full face like a dark demon's, sat like a statue, arm still out-thrust toward me.

"Listen, Marston," I said quietly. "No one holds you responsible for this. My opinion is that the men who brought you coffee put dope of some kind in it; that you slept like the dead, while they did the work, and that what they put in the java is reponsible for you being sick. I don't like you, and I never did and never will, as a man, but you're a soldier with a good record, and as far as I'm concerned you're above suspicion."

His big body relaxed suddenly, as if he had gone suddenly limp. A queer look leaped into his eyes, a sort of calculating gleam, as it were.

"Don't get excited, Marston," Fernald advised him in his equable way. "You weren't supposed to stay up all night, anyway, with the ship after the usual sightseers had left. Nobody's hurt much. Don't lose your shirt or go wild."

"Yes, sir," mumbled the sergeant, and relapsed into his brooding.

When we reached shore I gave the orders.

"Go to town with Bailey, Marston, and get a doctor for him. Both of you go to bed at the hotel. You're still feeling bad. My orders are that you spend the day in bed."

"Yes, sir."

They trundled off in the same Ford which I had used, and then Fernald turned to me.

"What about it, Slim?"

"Open and shut," I told him. "It's as plain as the nose on my face, and that's no secret. In the first place, Marston, as you may know, got as high as major in the war. I was under him when I was a cadet, and he was a harsh martinet who made life miserable for every cadet. He hated me, and I returned it with interest.

"Just a couple of days ago, when I found him a sergeant, I took off the old blouse and bars and licked him to a frazzle just for old time's sake. He doesn't figure there's room enough in the whole world for the two of us. That cock-and-bull story about a couple of mountaineers driving in, and then bringing him coffee is transparent. He filed the wires."

"Maybe he'd file yours, and get out of riding because of pretended sickness, but he's got nothing against me," Les protested, his eyes resting thoughtfully on me.

"Wait a minute. I don't figure that getting rid of me was all there was to it. Marston was a major, shot back to a sergeant. That made him hate the whole Army, and the Air Service in particular. I've heard him call the Flying Corps a bunch of Boy Scouts, because we're all amateur soldiers even if we are veteran flyers.

"I can see the change in him. Notice how sullen and discouraged and brooding-like he is? And his life has probably been more or less —— since he got to be a sergeant, because a lot of men who were under him at Donovan Field probably have ridden him pretty hard."

"What the —— are you getting at?"

"Suppose he hates the Service. He knows that these bombing tests are going to make or break not only the American Air Service, but every other Air Service as well, doesn't he? If we sink battleships, we're pretty near the first line of defense, aren't we, and even Congress can see that we've got to grow into a big boy, can't they? And in order to carry bombs big enough to even have a chance to sink ships we've got to have plenty of Martin Bombers, haven't we? And if the Martin factory put out four bombers a week, which is all they can do, right up to the time of the tests we won't have more than enough, will we?

"And if we don't get Martins the tests will be off, won't they. And before the world we'll be labeled an unreliable branch of the Service, ships uncertain, can't even get them a few hundred miles to Langham, to say nothing of being sure they'd ever get a hundred miles out to sea to drop bombs.

"Suppose Marston has become so bitter that he's off his nut a little, and wants to crab the Air Service every way. If he could burn down the Martin factory the tests would be off, wouldn't they? And he lied about being in bed at the time the fire happened, didn't he? He did get rid of the first two ships, holding us up several days, and now he's got rid of two more.

"He didn't figure the wrecks would happen so quickly. He figured we'd come down in the mountains somewhere, dead as doornails, with the ships so smashed up that no one could tell anything. And if he wasn't under suspicion at all, back at Langham, some fine night he could see to it that whatever ships finally got there, after you and I were grease spots on the side of a West Virginia mountain somewhere, could be destroyed some way—fire—anything."

Les took a long drag of his cigaret, and his steady eyes narrowed. Along the road, a hundred yards from the riverbank where we were standing, continuous lines of cars were passing. Several rowboats were out on the river, swarming around the gradually sinking Martin like waterbugs.

Finally he said slowly:

"By ——, it sounds right, Slim. He might be getting even with you and the Air Service at one swoop. But you're claiming, of course, that he's a nut. No sane man could cold-bloodedly do what he did to Bailey and me, anyway. Maybe to you."

"If he destroyed the ships at the field here, he'd be almost convicted before he started," I pointed out. "By his method, he figured on getting away free and clear."

"He's convicted now," Les returned.

"Sure, because the cables broke too quickly. But not, Les my boy, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, at that. In fact, we might be wrong. There may be some one or company or even country who wouldn't like to see these tests come off. Listen to my idea of how to proceed to nail Marston right to the cross."

Les listened, demurred a bit, argued, and finally we came to a decision. He finally agreed whole-heartedly with me on all points. The combination of circumstances was such as to make merely a cluster of coincidences seem very unlikely. Marston's past, and his present attitude; the fires at the Martin factory; the filed wires; and above all, the convenient sickness which made it impossible for him to go up in the crippled ships, all pointed one way.

Les stayed at Boundville to summon a wrecking crew from Dayton, salvage my ship, and likewise to watch Marston. I wired Washington and immediately hopped a train for that thriving village. I was met at the depot by a pop-eyed trio of high-ranking Air Service officials, was rushed to headquarters without an opportunity to scrub off the cinders, and in less than two minutes I was telling my wild and wooly yarn to the chief himself and six puzzled, scared and completely flabbergasted aides, assistants and adjutants. Having finished the story, I talked about Marston, not even deleting the fight. Following on, I submitted my scheme to them.

TO MAKE a long story short, at the end of three hours Chief Mallory got up from his chair, and paced up and down the floor silently for about a minute. He knows more about the Air Service, I sometimes think, than all the rest of the men in it put together. The bombing maneuvers were his brainchild, and he would be made, or broken, before the world by them.

He'd fought everything and everybody for three years, trying to get a chance for his young hellions to show what they could do, and he was pretty close to a temporary madman as he took in the full possibilities of what I had told him. Finally he whirled on me and said quickly—

"If we accept your procedure, Evans, you know what danger you'll be in?"

"Forwarned is forearmed, General," I told him. "I hate to run any chance of doing an injustice to Marston, and I'm leaning over backward so far that if I stubbed my toe I'd fall on my neck, simply because I don't want my personal prejudice against him to result in any possible injustice."

"I see," commented Mallory. "Gentlemen, we will proceed as Lieutenant Evans has suggested."

So I went back to Boundville, and with me came Colonel Feldmore, a spare, thin-faced, hard-boiled, genial and square old colonel who was in the Army before the Spanish-American war. Likewise, there sifted into town and out to Cleveland, various Secret Service men whose identity was known to nobody. Feldmore conducted an open investigation, and the Secret Service men started checking up on the two strange mountaineers, of whom Marston could give but a very vague description.

Feldmore took a half hour to give a tongue-lashing to Marston because he hadn't awakened, at least, when the vandals were about. But the careful impression built up by every one was that Marston was not suspected in the least of having had anything to do with filing the wires. He was exonerated. Of course, strictly speaking, he could have been punished for laxity while on guard.

But in guarding a ship, except in very particular and extraordinary cases, it is a custom of the Service merely to sleep out there for the purpose of keeping sightseers from climbing all over it. In many cases it isn't even guarded at all over night. Who'd want to tamper with an airplane? In moonshine country, or among people who have any possible reason for wanting to harm a ship or a flyer, careful guard is kept, of course. But ordinarily not any more than enough to guard a car.

Well, while the Secret Service men were snooping around Boundville and Cleveland, Marston, Fernald, a new mechanic named Gray, shipped on from Langham, and went back to Cleveland to bring the next shipment through. At the depot—Marston not knowing it, of course—was an operative to shadow him every minute.

Marston, as a matter of fact, was in rather a bad way. Despite the fact that he had been, as he thought, absolutely whitewashed, he looked more like a sick pup than ever. His physical sickness had disappeared within a few hours almost magically. But mentally he was an invalid still.

The Martin factory was heavily guarded, of course. The newspaper stories had been carefully taken care of; just a small item explaining my wreck as due to motor failure, and Fernald's as the result of a sharp downward current of air over the cool water, which is scientifically possible. No word of the filed wires had got about, nor any connection between the fires and the wrecks. Every laborer under suspicion, by the way, had proved an alibi; which, in a manner of speaking, strengthened the case against Marston. The operatives were tracing his movements the night of the fire, among other things.

One ship was ready to ramble when we got there, and it had machine-guns installed in the front observer's cockpit and also in the radio compartment in the rear of the bomb space. They had been shipped from Dayton, at my suggestion, to help guard the ships if necessary. I wired Washington, and was ordered to proceed with one ship and let Les follow when the second one was completed. Time was getting very precious, there were only two Martins at Langham, and practise must start very soon. Already the brigade would be four ships short—four fewer two-thousand pounders to help sink our battleship.

Marston and I took off bright and early one Wednesday morning. Just before we started I got word that Marston had made no suspicious moves while in Cleveland, had not even conversed with a stranger. Never the less I said to him just before we started—

"Ride in the front cockpit, will you Marston?"

It is less comfortable there than beside the pilot, for the folding observer's stool has no back to it. He looked at me with haggard eyes and seemed about to protest, but he said nothing.

The reason I put him there was to keep an eye on him. Marston, while he did not wear wings, could fly a bit. He had taken some instruction back at Donovan in the old days, just for the fun of it, I suppose. And if the man had it in for me the way I thought he did, I wanted to have him right before my optics at all times.

Lots of things can happen in a ship which those on the ground could never know. For instance, the left hand propeller tip whirled around right close to my head. Marston could grab me suddenly as I was flying and shove my head just a few inches over the side of the cockpit, and said six-foot prop, traveling fifteen hundred times a minute, would have gone through that bony knot on the top of my spine like a buzzsaw would through a cream puff.

Then he could land the ship, maybe safely, and pretend to have cracked it up, thus again killing two birds with one stone. No one would know that my own carelessness had not killed me. I simply mention this as one of the many possibilities. So I put him in front of me, where he couldn't make a move without my seeing it, and I had a Colt handy to my hand—very handy.

With both twelve-cylinder Libertys well tuned up I taxied over the smooth field at the factory, and took off. Around and around that little slab of green we circled, getting altitude while Fernald, down below, alternately waved and then shook his head. Funny how the Air Service likes to kid by pretending to be sure a man's going to be killed every time he goes up.

Cleveland is a funny town from the air. It's very long, along the lakefront, and very thin the other way. It sprawls like a fat worm on the ground. A veritable network of railroads run out of it toward the south, so I set a compass course, synchronized my two motors, read the dizzying array of instruments, and settled back to watch Marston. I figured that, if we had allayed any ideas he might have that he was under suspicion, something might happen. Probably in Boundville again, but just a possibility of something else.

Well, it hit quick. I'll say it did.

We were roaring along over the large, smooth, many-colored Ohio fields, about twenty or thirty miles south of Cleveland, when I spied a ship coming toward us. It was far in the distance, coming from the south. I figured it was a Dayton ship, of course. As it came closer I identified it as a Jenny, one of the ninety horse-power, two-seated training ships which every cadet broke in on. I thought then that it was a civilian passenger-carrying crate, because no Dayton flyer would make a cross-country trip in a Jenny. It seems like walking compared to a D. H. or a scout.

Marston was sitting there in the nose of the ship, his hands on the machine-gun scarf-mount and his head resting on his hands. His broad, powerful back did not move at all, and he had never looked around. He had his goggles up, I noticed.

IN A short time, approaching each other at around eighty miles an hour, the other ship was close to us. It was not an Army ship, for it was painted a bright yellow, and it flashed golden in the sun. It was coming toward us at an angle. That was natural. A Martin Bomber is quite a sight in the air, trundling along like an aerial lumber wagon. It's so heavy that it's fairly stable, and after one gets off the ground the wheel handles so easily a baby could work it, so I watched the other ship and flew my huge craft automatically.

The ship was possibly a hundred and fifty yards from us, coming at a slight angle, as I've said. It was perhaps fifty feet above us. Suddenly it banked a bit, and its new course brought it on a line parallel to ours, but it was pointed, of course, in the opposite direction. In a flash I caught sight of a double Lewis machine-gun, swung on a scarf-mount in the back cockpit.

As it sprayed its hail of lead I had nosed my big, loggy Martin over as far as it would go. At the same second Marston, I realized, had stiffened, spun half around, recovered, and was at his guns. They had got him—I saw the blood soaking one arm of his flying suit.

I threw my ship around as the equally slow, but much smaller, Jenny banked and flew back at right angles to us for another shot, from above and behind. I spun the wheel desperately, to get the Bomber's nose pointed toward the other ship. Subconsciously I realized that all my suspicions of Marston had been wrong. There was some gang trying to crab getting the Martins to Langham.

I was straightened around for them as the Jenny crossed above us, those wicked guns being sighted by the gunner in the rear. We were looking right up into their muzzles, a hundred feet away. Marston was on his knees, sighting too. If we were to get them

I *must* hold the ship in position for a moment more. It was shot for shot.

It was. I saw Marston's hand, a mass of blood, pull the trigger of his Lewis as a terrific impact made me cry out and seemed to pin me to the seat. Something crashed through my chest, and I felt as if I had been torn apart. As if in a dream I saw the Jenny spinning downward. Then, through blurred eyes that could not transfer to my brain what they saw, I saw a huge bulk looming above me. It looked as big as all the world. I knew the Martin was diving like mad for the ground, but my nerveless, groping fingers could not find the wheel. And I didn't care. In short, I went out like a light, my last remembrance being a torrent of blood flowing down over my body.

V

I CAME partly to, not entirely, in what looked like a hospital, and for two weeks I was so weak I couldn't even talk. In another week I was out of danger, and by the end of a month I knew I was in a Cleveland hospital. Then Les Fernald and Jim Tolley —Jim had taken my place as a ferry pilot— were allowed to see me.

"So you're going to get well! My, my!" grinned Fernald. "Can't the Air Service ever get rid of you?"

"I'm trying my best," I told him. "What happened after I passed out?"

"Marston got you out of the seat and took the wheel before your ship crashed. He was —— badly wounded himself, an artery severed, for one thing, but he flew the ship with one hand and held a handkerchief to your chest with another, flew back to Cleveland and landed. That Martin came in like a drunken duck, and he cracked the landing gear all to ——, then fainted in the ship."

"Is he alive?"

"Sure. But he'd about bled to death when he got here, and you'd have been as dead as the free silver issue if he hadn't——"

"Well I'll be ——!" was all that I could think of to say, and Les assured me that I was that already.

"Where's the sarge now?" was my next question.

"Oh, he got his strength back quick— wounds weren't as bad as yours—and he's in the hospital at Langham now."

"Well, have the sleuths unearthed anything?"

"Plenty, but not all," big, serious Tolley told me. "One of the men in the Jenny that fought you was alive, but he wouldn't say a word. They've arrested three more, though. Don't know whether what they've said so far is right."

"Come on—get out of here!" my jovial doctor interrupted at this stage, coming into the room. "Slim's still weak as a cup of tea. Tell him tomorrow, whatever it is."

Before I left the hospital Les, who visited me every trip, told me confidentially all that had happened. Hold your breath now, and prepare. I suppose you think that at the very least you're about to hear that all the countries of the world got together and concentrated their nefarious master-spies in Cleveland and Boundville, bent on the destruction of the American Air Service. Well, they didn't. There is no international ephillipsoppenheiming about to be indulged in by me.

With that out, you figure big business. It is always proper to blame Wall Street for everything from the earthquake in Japan to the fact that it didn't rain in the wheatbelt during July. Well, that's out, too. You might know that anything I was connected with would turn out to be a farce-comedy eventually. I had to lay back in my bed and laugh myself sick again when I heard it. If there'd been any bullets left in my carcass they'd have clinked together like a castenets.

The fact of the matter was that a wealthy, gentle, gray-haired old nut inventor—a man who'd evidently gone crazy trying to get a perpetual motion machine or something like that—was really responsible for the whole thing. He's safely ensconced in a lunatic asylum now, working on a mechanical fly-swatter or something like that. The facts are approximately as follows:

This old fellow was a multimillionaire, and for years had been trying in his senile way to invent things. Finally he'd concentrated on the Air Service, and had been submitting to McCook Field all sorts of things from a motor run by gun powder to an automobile that turned into a ship, wings sprung out, a propeller attached to the front of the motor, and all that. Naturally, all his stuff was infinitely ridiculous. If you don't believe how many crack-brained inventors there are who submit perpetual motion machines and all that, ask an official of any big company, or the patent office. And McCook Field gets its share.

He had been a harmless old coot, although a nuisance. Well, when the bombing was broached, he set to work, and figured out a scheme to carry bombs, each bomb to be hung under an individual balloon which was to be filled with poison gas. Then there was some magnetic idea which would make the bomb and the balloon go straight for the battleship attracted by the steel in it. When the bomb hit, the balloon would burst and spread poison gas all over. The only thing he hadn't figured out was what would become of the pilot, except that he might jump into the middle of the ocean in a parachute.

This old bird was very patriotic, offering all his nutty ideas to the Government free and clear. Now comes the hitch. A soldier of fortune, named Gimbel, and reputedly—I never met him—a very keen, unscrupulous and strong-minded person, had attached himself to this old gentleman and worked him for a fairly comfortable living, suggesting newer and nuttier ideas and pretending to help him work on them at a comfortable salary.

The old boy trusted him a good deal, and was pretty strongly under the sway of said Gimbel. Gimbel had decided, evidently, that he wanted a big piece of change all in a lump, instead of putting up with the vagaries of the old boy for merely a stipend, so to speak. So he'd worked on the old boy's mind, helping him become convinced that there was a deep laid plot to keep the Government from taking advantage of this priceless method of bombing.

The inventor was absolutely certain, finally, that the Government was in the hands of traitors who were working deliberately to make the bombing tests a failure, or at least, not as successful as they could be. The Martin factory, Gimbel convinced him, had bribed high Government officials to make them turn down his invention so that they could sell a lot of very expensive ships.

Then Gimbel convinced him that, in view of the fine patriotic motives behind the scheme, it would be a good thing to get rid of the factory entirely, thus at one and the same time getting rid of a big business which was working against the country for their own ends, and forcing the country to use the balloons and bombs of the inventor, which, of course, would be tremendously successful.

Gimbel patriotically offered to burn the Martin factory, or in some way stop the use of Martins in the tests, for a consideration of three hundred thousand dollars to be paid him because of the risk. The old boy fell for it and, when the thing was broken up, was actually working about fifty men getting the magnetic apparatus ready, and had sent a letter to a prominent rubber company in Akron, warning them to be ready to furnish the Government at least thirty free balloons at a month's notice.

Gimbel, hot after the three hundred grand, had decided to carry on after the failure of his attempt to ignite the factory in Cleveland. He had assured the old boy that the wrecks in Boundville had been due to the rotten construction of the Martins, and did not plan to let him realize what he was actually doing.

You can see, by the methods used, how easy it would be to ruin enough ships *en route*, without being caught, they figured, to cause the bombing to be a bust that year. And that meant Gimbel's three hundred thousand. He had got the aged millionaire so completely *non compos mentis* that the poor old man considered it a holy crusade for the good of the country.

The way Gimbel was operating was this:

Two men had drifted to the field at Boundville, without anybody seeing them, chatted with Marston, and then suggested some coffee. They had doped it, so Marston slept like the dead and they came back and filed the wires. In the gang Gimbel had collected—three men, it appeared—there was one flyer. In some way they were informed when I left Cleveland—that would be simple enough—and their plan of shooting me down was a very good one.

The wreck would have been a total, soul-satisfying and complete catastrophe, of course, with four tons dropping a few thousand feet out of control. Fire would have been inevitable, and the chance of ever discovering, from two heaps of bones, that we had been shot would have been negligible. By the time it was decided the two flyers would have been safely away, anyhow.

They might have reported the wreck themselves, or landed, looked over the bones, and made certain that any tell-tale signs of bullets had disappeared before they did anything about reporting it. Any farmers around would have known nothing whatever about such technical matters, and guns can not be heard above the roar of motors.

ON my way back to Langham, and for several hours before I started, I had a good chance to think over all that Marston had done. Desperately wounded as he was, he had had to climb from his cockpit over into mine, get the ship under control from the seat alongside me, leaning over to grasp the wheel, and then unbuckle my belt and heave me out of my seat.

Then he had probably slid into my seat himself, and in some way pulled my far from minute body up beside him. He had flown the bomber back into Cleveland, amateur as he was at airmanship, and stanched my wound and let his own bleed.

When I arrived at the field all the gang were there. The leading flyers of the border, the California fields and even from Panama, Hawaii and the Philippines, were on the job practising for the big chance. And Marston was still the hero of the field.

I got my flight back, and went to see him right away.

"Thanks, Marston," I said as we shook hands.

"Don't bother yourself, Lieutenant," he returned in his rasping voice.

The sullen look was gone, but otherwise he was the same. He wasn't any chunk of soft-soap by any means. But his grudge against the Army in general had disappeared, anyway. A little adulation will go a long, long way.

"You gave me a square deal when you might have ruined me," he went on without a smile, his light eyes staring belligerently into mine. "You gave me a chance. You're a man, Lieutenant, I'll say that for you. But as a soldier——"

I let him talk. We were alone. Then I talked.

"Same goes for you, Marston," I informed him. "You saved my life, and you proved yourself a —— good man. I admire you. But my personal opinion of you still goes. We'll get along. I'll give orders and you'll take 'em, and this is the last occasion for conversation on anything except business that we'll have."

"Yes, sir. Now about Number 14, I think she's ready for test."

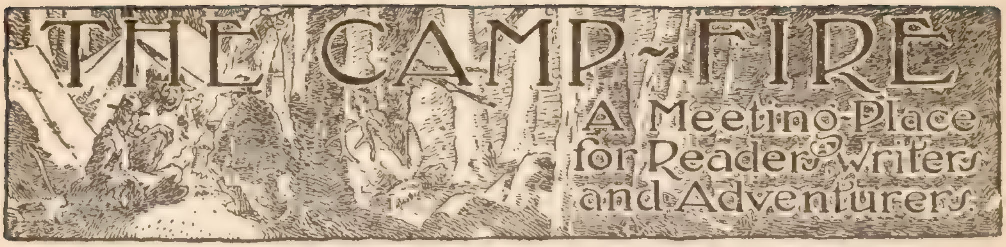
And that was that.

Not only that, but it's about every bit of it, I guess. You probably thought I was going to make myself out a hero. Now you see how dumb I was. All wrong. Funny how I keep muddling through, getting dumber and dumber, seems like, every year. I'd like to report that Marston and I fell into each other's arms, and that he became my stanch friend and my man Friday and all that, but even in that this yarn is completely cockeyed, and isn't like it ought to be at all.

But that's the way things work out in real life, I guess. Marston and I respect each other, and it's nothing to his discredit that he doesn't like me. He can find several people who would say that disliking me was only another proof of his remarkable powers.

Occasionally, when the wind is in the east, I am a pessimist, and at those times—whisper it—I'm inclined to agree with those last-named folks.

And that *is* all of it.



THE CAMP-FIRE

A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THERE is, undoubtedly, the translation and explanation of the strange-looking characters found on an old sextant case, concerning whose meaning one of us appealed to the rest of us.

Now as to those old-time sea captains who sailed their "stately wind-driven ships" over all the seas there are and now, high and dry in these days of steam, look back upon the splendid days of old with longing regret and a tinge of lonesomeness, well, if one of them were to write to Bill Adams—

The characters ☾◡☾—✱—αβ in the old sextant-case mentioned in Camp-Fire of January 10, 1925, are not cipher code in connection with buried treasure.

THE ancient owner of the instrument evidently took lunar observations and marked the characters in the sextant-case as a reminder to take an altitude of the moon by bringing its lower limb down to the horizon ☾◡; also to measure the angular distance between the moon and a star ☾—✱. The star is probably one of the two second magnitude stars in the constellation of Pegasi. A straight line passing through the stars αβ in Pegasi will point to the star β Pegasi in the shoulder of the constellation ✱—αβ.

The star β Pegasi bears north of the other second magnitude star α Pegasi, and is distant from him about thirteen degrees. α Pegasi (Markab) was one of the nine bright fixed stars selected in the path of the moon and whose distances from it were published in very old copies of the Nautical Almanac in order to facilitate the method of determining longitude by lunar distances.

"THOSE old time captains sometimes marked or wrote astronomical characters or data on the tops of sextant-cases to serve as reminders for formulas in connection with nautical astronomy. We may be sure they used neither characters nor notes to refresh their memories when they tacked, wore, box-hauled and club-hauled their stately wind-driven ships in the days when Edmund Blunt sold them quadrants, sextants, charts and log-books in his shop under the sign of the quadrant at the corner of Water and Fulton Streets, and John Richardson at 133 Fulton Street taught them navigation and lunar distances by easy methods and at reasonable terms. Those were the days when Chester Jennings kept the City Hotel on lower Broadway and sincerely assured all sea captains, mates, supercargoes and others that the former gloomy appearance of the interior was changed by extensive improvements. Also that he had procured an ample stock of choice wines and a variety of excellent liquors, and pledged himself that his exertions would be unremitting to supply their tables with whatever was rare in kind and excellent in quality.

Lunar distances, flying jib downhauls, fore-topmast staysail halliards, spanker head outhauls, fore clew gaskets, topsail clewlines, buntlines and reef-tackles, choice wines and excellent liquors, full-rigged ships, barks and brigs, together with the men who sailed them, have long ago passed to the port of unforgotten things, never to return. Because of this we may assume that, among the few still remaining here high and dry, there are one or two who feel a little lonesome.—T. Shanahan.

WHAT was the best fighting formation or organization before the use of gun-powder? A comrade proposes what ought to be an interesting discussion:

Philadelphia.

There's something I'd like to see chewed over at Camp-Fire. Barring firearms as such, what was the most efficient weapon, from a military view-point and with due regard for the battle tactics associated with it? Or let me put it another way: What military organization of all time prior to the period of firearms was most efficient in the field? Could the Roman legion, with its javelins, its short swords, its open order and its "testudo" and similar formations, have licked the Normans as they fought when they conquered England? Could the Dalcassian "catha" of Brian Boru, with its deadly one-handed, thumb-guided axes, its handstones, its longbows and its staffslings and casting spears have cracked the Macedonian phalanx and its hedge of twenty-one-foot spears?

Of course a satisfactory decision could never be rendered in such a discussion. But the discussion could be made mighty interesting, I think.—Philip Francis Nowlan.

SINCE the beginning of Camp-Fire the death of no other old-timer of the West has brought in so many letters and tributes as has the killing of Bill Tilghman at Cromwell, Oklahoma, November 1.

Perhaps the following from an Oklahoma paper best summarizes the universal high respect in which he was held:

Only governors and jurists have slept beneath the mellow luminance of the capitol rotunda with olive-drab guardsmen at attention by their biers.

Bill Tilghman was the first who hadn't occupied a high post in the State government to bring a hush to the main floor of the statehouse.

"Like the State's greatest jurist he contributed to the cause of law in Oklahoma," said Governor Trapp, who ordered the guardsmen to attend while the body of Tilghman lay in state. "He sacrificed himself for the same law which actuated governors and judges of the past."

Among the throngs who viewed the body late Monday were Governor Trapp, Judge Thomas H. Doyle, dean of the criminal court of appeals, and W. A. Durant, veteran statesman, now chief of the Oklahoma land office.

Here the three who helped lay the foundation on which the commonwealth was built, construed its laws and administered its business, bid farewell to the friend who spent his years preserving that which they had builded.

At this writing the fate of his killer, a prohibition enforcement officer being officially investigated on a charge of being in league with the underworld, is not known to me. As the above newspaper article and scores of others make plain, public opinion has no doubts as to the death of Bill Tilghman, town marshal of Cromwell, being as honorable as his long life has been.

Our magazine's interest is a particular one, as Bill Tilghman was about to take charge of one of the departments of "Ask Adventure." We do not lightly trust these departments to any one and we should have been especially proud to have Bill Tilghman thus definitely associated with us.

I know that Camp-Fire rises to its feet to pay to this comrade its silent tribute and to wish him Godspeed over the Long Trail.

KNOWING that other sailormen will be quick to seize upon any inaccuracy or seeming inaccuracy, Ralph R. Perry has a word to say about his story in this issue:

I went on watch at four A.M. in the hurricane described in "The Proving of Old Man Lindquist," and spent most of the watch helping to rig in our lifeboats. We carried them swung forty feet above the water but, at that, we lost three before we could swing them inboard, even although we had had plenty of warning of what we were going to catch. The ship was off the Azores, so the blow could not be classified as a tropical hurricane. Off the Azores the center of low barometric pressure had probably become trough-shaped, instead of small and circular, and on that account the regular shifts of the force and direction of the wind such as enabled Lindquist to forecast the path of the storm his vessel was to encounter were not present to warn us. Like him, however, we bucked through the center —and instead of making a run of three hundred and fifty miles, a day, we advanced only about twenty-five miles.

I went over the story carefully, working out the position of the ship at various times from an actual voyage and comparing that with the data Bowditch gives on hurricanes. They vary so much in force, area and intensity that sailors are constantly arguing about them, so it pays to be unusually right.—Ralph R. Perry.

OUR American habit of testing everything in accordance with whether it is "practical" is unsound because most of us aren't wise enough to interpret the word "practical" in anything but a materialistic sense. We just go ahead and "reason" things out. Most of us can't reason very well because we lack a real sense of logic. And logic, even at its human best, is an untrustworthy guide in the really important affairs of life.

From a story by T. S. Stribling, not yet scheduled in our magazine, I take the following. Lest some rise up to call me an atheist or something, "religion," as used in the following, does not mean things spiritual but merely man's "practical," "reasonable" and "logical" manipulations of it.

You will remember that Laurence Stallings in the New York *World* quoted the editor of the London *Mercury* as rating Mr. Stribling far above Ibañez as a writer. Personally, that doesn't mean a whole lot because Ibañez and his "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" always seemed to me ridiculously overrated—another example of how the public is prone to rave over a foreign writer because the faded and none too competent critics find endorsement of foreign or unusual things an easy way to get a reputation for culture and wonderful literary discrimination. I edited copy on stories by Ibañez eighteen years ago when I'll venture 98 per cent. of the critics had never heard of him. I fail to see any wonderful improvement in his work or to find "The Four Horsemen" anything but a very second-rate book at best. If some of the critics, instead of just raving over it, would give me a carefully analyzed reason for raving, I should be grateful. I'm for a law limiting the number of books any critic may review in a year and prohibiting any professional critic from continuing as such for more than five years. After that time most of them go stale and lose their sense of proportion to such an extent that they no longer have a point of view even remotely of real value to the public. Since it's the fashion to pass laws against anything any one doesn't like, why not this one?

But I'd like to add something to Mr. Stallings' praise of T. S. Stribling's work. (Mr. Stallings, by the way, has *not* served five years as a professional critic and, so far at least, seems to do his own thinking.) I make this prediction—quite undisturbed by any scoffing of professional critics or their sheep—that if Mr. Stribling continues as he has begun he will some day be ranked among the world's greatest satirists.

The following, however, is quoted merely because of what it says about the fallibility of logic, god of the "practical" minded:

> "My spies are lying," he said in a heavy undertone. "I think we would best beat them after all."
>
> "No," said Poggioli, "that would do no good. They are genuinely confused."
>
> "But why do they say the sun jumped and their ears came off?"
>
> "They are rationalizing."
>
> "What's that?"
>
> "They don't know what happened, and their minds automatically try to bridge in the gap. What they are striving for is a logic to carry on their thoughts. Logic is supposed to be a test of truth, Governor, but it is the mother of a million falsities. The human mind can not accept a gap in its reflections, so it invents fillers, and that is the basis of religion and metaphysics."
>
> "I believe a beating would help," persisted the Governor.
>
> "For heaven sake don't make martyrs out of these men!" cried the psychologist. "Somehow or another torture sets a rationalist firmer in his faith."

MORE about the winged hats that, Kipling and others to the contrary, the vikings did not wear. Also some interesting things about the vikings in general—in particular something about the part played by bows and arrows in ancient battles.

> Shoshoni, Wyoming.
>
> Glad to see that Mr. Brodeur has come out and dealt a blow to that modern idea that the Wickings wore winged or horned helmets. After a study of old Norse literature for over 45 years, I have not found a single reference to the use of such ornaments to the helmet.
>
> With Mr. Brodeur, I think that the Wickings were too good and intelligent fighters to encumber their helmets with wings and projections that would enable an enemy to disable them the quicker, by leaving some projection on the helmet to catch the full force of a blow instead of glancing it off.
>
> THE conical helmet seems to have come into fashion after 750. The earliest mention of the nose-piece occurs in the account of the battle of the Jomswickings with Earl Hakon of Norway about 988. But remember all the time that the earliest Scandinavian records that we have were written after 1080, so sometimes the writers in getting in details were apt to supply data from the custom of their own days. There is a French manuscript of the 10th century that shows the nose-piece. The Bayeux tapestry shows the conical helmet and nose-piece very clearly (1070). Bear in mind that the armor at the time of the battle of Hastings would be pretty near of the same pattern throughout in

the North. The Normans probably made some slight improvements, but the house-carles of Harold would be armed in the best style, Harold himself being a grandson of Canute, and Canute's house-carles were probably in the lead of the fighting men from 1010 to 1040 and no doubt got all improvements up to date.

From runic stone pictures the earlier helmet seems to have been shaped like a Highlander's cap. The Beowulf helmet, with the boar-head ornament, I take to have been of this type. The earlier helmets of the last of the bronze age and beginning of the iron age seem to have been of very flimsy construction and inferior to those of the true Wicking age.

THE true Wickings were located around the Wick or what is known today as the Christiania Fiord. This included all Jutland, the Danish Isles, the Southwest coast of Sweden and the southern part of Norway. The bulk of the population seem to have been largely Danish instead of Swedish.

The earliest recorded Wicking raid is that of Hygelac in 515-520. This is notable as it gives us the historic key for the poem of "Beowulf." Still, there is a strong supposition for the belief that the expedition of Hengest and Horsa was a real Wicking movement, as they were leaders of Jutes, a subtribe of the Danes. This, as you know, lead to the conquest of Kent. Personally I am in thorough agreement with Mr. Brodeur in believing that the Hengest mentioned in "Beowulf" and in "Finn's Lay" is the same man as the conqueror of Kent, and if he is, his following must have been largely recruited from the Danes proper.

BETWEEN 720 to 750 there must have been a great movement by the South Danes for the conquest of South Sweden and South Norway and this movement culminated in the great Bravalla fight which ended with the defeat of the Danes. Present Scandinavian and English authorities are rather vague as regards the date of this fight. It has been placed anywhere between 740 to 812, but the truth is that 770 is the real date. Anyhow, this was a turning-point in the Wicking age. The Ness Vickings, who cruised around promontories and never went far from home, seem now to have got together and made raids to the northwest coast of Europe and the British Isles and inside of 50 years from the date of Bravalla their keels were seen on every shore from the Elbe to Gibraltar. Through the dim traditions which cluster around Bravalla, we can note that it was noteworthy as being one of two decisive battles that were won by the use of missiles in the shape of arrows. The Thelemarken archers by their skill deciding the day after the Danish army had it about won. From there on until the day of Hastings hardly a great battle was decided by bowmen.

NOW as the the latitude that the early Norsemen reached in America. The bulk of the settlement, or rather voyages, I hardly think went any farther south than Massachusetts, and probably Nova Scotia would be far nearer the mark. But the references to the "Whiteman's Land or Greater Ireland" and the casting away of Biorn Asbrandson and Ari Marson would indicate that they had some information of the coast as far south as the Carolinas. One voyage, that of Gudleif Gudlangson, must have reached land farther south than either Leif Ericsson or Thorfinn. Yet one can not call these regular voyages, as Gudleif was borne to the east and southeast of Ireland by contrary winds. I note that Mr. Mackay makes the error of calling Leif Ericsson Lief Ericsson.

NOW as to Nordic features. Are there any really standard Nordic features, and is there any really pure Nordic race? I don't think so.

The Sweden and Norwegians are presumed to be the purest examples, yet their very earliest traditions show them to have mixed to a slight extent with the partly Mongolian Finns and Lapps. The superior race either killed the males of the inferior race or made slaves of them and the women were also captured and made bondmaidens.

The Wickings, again, captured women and men thralls from all parts of Europe and brought them home. There is no country in Europe that has not been flooded time after time by a Nordic invasion. In historic times look at the infusion of Mongolian blood that must have been made in Central Europe, by the widespread conquest of the Huns under Attila. Do we find the ancient Greek classical features which represent the highest type, common among the purer Nordic races? The question of Nordic features among the Indians is rather interesting. Years ago I was standing in an Indian agency store and looking at a large picture of William J. McKinley, and therein walked an old Arapahoe Indian and the profile of the Indian was almost exactly that of the picture of McKinley. The resemblance of the full face was also remarkable. Three of us stood there and commented on the resemblance.—EDW. L. CRABB.

ONCE at Camp-Fire we had a letter to Arthur D. Howden Smith from a bowyer and fletcher, because it seemed of interest that archery—not just shooting at targets but for big game—should be sufficiently popular in these days to warrant making a business of turning out real bows and arrows. I said at the time that I'd be equally willing to mention any other bowyers and fletchers and two have taken me up. Here we are:

Hialeah, Florida.

I am at Hialeah, Florida, where I am in charge of an archery golf club, a trap-shooting club and I make bows and arrows. Have made same for some very prominent people. I have killed nothing larger than a mountain lion as yet, but I hope to go to Africa to kill lions, etc., and make motion pictures. I use the strongest bows of any archer in the United States for hunting. I use a 75-pound bow for target work. This weight is considered a heavy hunting weight. My big yew hunting bow pulls 105 pounds; with this bow, "Skullbiter," I have killed a mountain lion and have literally riddled a trench helmet.

My strongest bow of all "Sekenenre Taa-Aa-Ken" pulls 150 pounds and is a veritable bow of Odysseus. This was named for one of the greatest and least known Egyptian Kings who drove out the

"Shasa" or Hyksos. He was killed in battle and Ahmose finished his work. His mummy shows all wounds in front.

As my name indicates, I am descended from the race that fought the English longer than all the rest of the world put together and made less noise about it. I mean the Kymri. My first English ancestor here was Captain William Powell who came to Jamestown, Virginia, in 1611. He was an Indian fighter and had a most inconvenient habit (to the Indians) of cutting their heads off. Another one was Colonel Lewis Powell, a friend of Washington.

By the way, did you know fully one third of the English Army at Cressy were Welsh, mostly archers?—Earl B. Powell.

The second comes from the Archers Company of Indian Hill at New Orleans:

New Orleans, Louisiana.

At the present time we have five bowyers and four fletchers, and are training more to take care of the growing demand for archery tackle.

Until recently it was impossible to secure tackle at a price that would be within the reach of the average person, but by using modern methods of manufacturing, we have been able to turn out good serviceable bows at reasonable prices in boys' and men's sizes, also an excellent hunting outfit for big game. The latter which is used by our Mr. Rounsevelle on all his hunting trips. It happens that he is leaving on a deer hunt tomorrow.—Wm. A. Pardoe.

PIKE'S PEAK to the front again. Comrade Raymond W. Thorp said it was named after Zebulon Pike, Comrade Ed. Lindsey said it was named after Albert Pike. Comrade Wm. D. Conway introduces Piketon, Ohio into the controversy:

Columbus, Ohio

The Albert Pike of which Lindsey speaks has never come into my range before, however, as Mr. Lindsey claims that Albert Pike's home was at Little Rock, Arkansas, there must be some mistake somewhere in Mr. Lindsey's source of information insofar as the right Pike is concerned.

About two weeks ago I drove over the old "Scioto Trail" between Portsmouth, Ohio, and Chillicothe, Ohio, and passed through the small town of Piketon, which is claimed as the birthplace of General Zebulon M. Pike, the man Pike's Peak was named for.

Piketon, Ohio, is located in the north central part of Pike County, and is as mentioned above on the Scioto Trail along which at a few places are still seen a few of the mounds of the prehistoric moundbuilders. Probably some of the old timers at Piketon, could give you authentic information as to whether Pike's Peak was named for General Zebulon Pike, or for Albert Pike as Mr. Lindsey claims. In the event of it being Albert that Pike's Peak was named for, it's time we were knowing about it. But where has Albert Pike been all these years that some one hasn't pushed him to the front of the stage before this?—Wm. D. Conway.

And then Comrade Thorp brings up Lamberton, New Jersey, against Piketon, Ohio:

Charleston, South Carolina.

Piketon, Pike County, sounds encouraging, but it happens that Zebulon Pike was born in Lamberton, New Jersey. Whence came the name, then? Possibly from that same Albert Pike discussed by Mr. Lindsey. Mayhap someone of "Campfire" knows of the gent, or anyway of Piketon, Pike County.—Raymond W. Thorp.

And will any comrade from Lamberton, New Jersey, or Piketon, Pike County, Ohio, now come forward? I take it that Piketon and Pike County were both named after the same man. Is this correct and who was he?

A FRAGMENT out of a letter from Barry Scobee of our writers' brigade:

It is just possible I have the only arrow in the world from old Sitting Bull's quiver. And this is how it happened:

Years ago I knew a man named Lee who, he told me, had been appointed by the Government to take a census of the Sioux Indians and, as I recall his talk, he was on that job when Sitting Bull was killed in 1890 and went some time afterward to visit his widow—or widows, as I remember he said. And he said that there he obtained from her, or them, Sitting Bull's medicine stone, quiver, bow, about six arrows, pipe, etc. I saw the things I name, laid them on a chair, and took a photograph of them. Then I persuaded Mr. Lee to give me one of the arrows, which I still have. Shortly afterward he placed all these objects in the museum of the Cherokee County, Kansas, high school, and within a few months, or a year or two, it was destroyed by fire and these Indian articles with it—so I was informed by a newspaper article or letter. Mr. Lee was a scholar and gentleman and a wholly sober and reliable citizen of Columbus, Kansas, and his word can not reasonably be doubted. He passed away a year or so ago.—Barry Scobee.

LETTERS in praise of our writers seldom are given space in "Camp-Fire," but this one deserves to be an exception. Harold Lamb sent it to me and his are the queries on Russian words that were not clear in handwriting:

My dear Sir: I am Victor L. Kaledine son of the Nakaziroi (Nakaznoi ?) Ataman of the Don Cossacks, General L. Kaledine. My father was the first White General of the White Guards (1917-1919),* the army formed by him against the Red Bolshevists. I am an ex-Esaul (Captain) of the

Donskoy Imperial Guard Regiment, the White Brothers of the Don.

"*Tchelom Vam*" Mister Lamb (the forehead to you), for your Cossack Stories.

My ancestor Yetman of Ukraina Mazepa was a famous "bogatir" and the Siech and Dniepr knew him well. In the winter of 1912 I met an old "bandura man" known now as a "kobsarist" ("kobsa") in a "choutor" or stiep village near Kieff. Many a beautiful song he gave us as we sat listening to him by the light of a small oil lamp.

Life is against us,
We are born crying,
Life that commenced us
Leaves us all dying.
We are born crying
We shall die sighing.

Shall we sit idle?
Follow Death's dance!
Pick up your bridle,
Saddle and lance—
*Brothers, advance!
(*Cossacks)

Though the Dark Raider
Rob us of joy
Death the Invader
Comes to destroy—
Nichevo! Stoi!!

My friends, Cossacks from Ural, Don, and Terek, have read your stories many times in our "staniza" (club) of the Don Cossack's Staniza of New York. We think that the real position of the Siech was on a small island near the right delta of Dniepr ("Zaparozie") "Pereg" means delta. Ayub is not a real Cossack name—it is more of a Circassian origin (meaning "oak"). Demid is a real ancient Cossack name. "Kunak" is a Caucasian word meaning "great friend." "Svitka" is a long coat worn by the Cossacks.

I wonder if you have ever tasted the real corn brandy, "vodka" or the cherry "varenoucha." You don't mention in your stories the word "pernatch" (marshal's baton)—every Koshevoi Ataman had one.

One of my ancestors was named Rurik the One Handed; he was a Esaul of the Cossack Guard that fought against Catherine the Great.

My grandmother's name was Ouliana (?) Kaledina (Kaledine). My grand uncle was a well known Russian author (Mordowtzeff Daniel)—some of his books have been translated into English. Here in New York I have still a valuable collection of our family legends, songs, etc., etc. They are entirely in your disposition, Mr. Lamb.

Once more,
Tchelom to you, Mr. Lamb!—Victor L. Kaledine.

As for the *pernatch*—as Kaledine writes it—or baton, it has appeared in several of my Cossack stories. I think *Rurik*, in "Men from Below" had one, but I did not know this Cossack name for it. Remember that the dialects of the Ukraine differ greatly from Russian and somewhat from one another.

And the Cossack is affiliated with almost every near Eastern language. The word *bogatir* (hero) mentioned by K. appears in Russian, and in Turki as *bhagator*. You are familiar with the *bahadur* of Moslem regiments in British India.

K's translation of the song is good. Ran across it previously as a sort of saying—"We are born crying and must go out of the world moaning," etc.

You remember from the Khlit tales that the Siech was the war encampment of the Cossacks, and its position was a secret.—Harold Lamb.

IT SEEMS plain enough to me that one man is born about as good as another and with as much right to live and be free and get what pleasure he can out of living. Indeed, that's what a government is for—to protect its people in these rights, the people from whom it gets its own right to exist and function. If any form of government begins to work against these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it and erect a new one of such nature that it will better ensure their safety and happiness.

Of course, an old government should not be changed for too slight cause, and the people's patient habit of bearing things as long as they can is surety against this. But when a long series of abuses promises to put them under too despotic a despotism it is not only their right but their duty to throw off a government of that kind and build anew.

DOES the above sound too radical to you? Dangerous stuff? Well, it sort of seemed to me, in these days when there is so much propaganda being sent abroad among us to the effect that the common people aren't fit to govern themselves and that government must be in the hands of the few who, they say, are really fit to handle it, that the above thoughts were pertinent and rather needed.

With the theory of this propaganda to bolster up the gradual suppressing of the ordinary individual's personal freedom we see ourselves being gradually deprived of the fundamental rights of free speech, free assemblage, the right to bear arms and whatever else tends toward giving the people at large a chance to run their own government instead of letting a "superior" few run it for them—or for themselves. More and more we see the body of the people being exploited and controlled by the few for the enrichment and general profit of the few. We are a patient people, as history has shown, but patience may come to an end, as history also shows.

NO, I'M not advocating armed rebellion against our government. Do my first two paragraphs sound too radical? Don't you agree with the principles and ideas they set forth? No? Well, all right. No use blaming me. You'll have to take it out of John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson, Robert Morris, John Adams, Caesar Rodney, Charles Carroll, Benjamin Franklin and the rest of the wild-eyed radicals who wrote the Declaration of Independence.

FOR it happens that in those first two paragraphs I didn't try to say anything myself but merely translated into more colloquial English the exact ideas and principles carefully set forth in the second and third paragraphs of said Declaration of Independence. Kindly refer to same for verification, though it is dollars to doughnuts that the doughty patriots who were so quick to brand me a dangerous radical not only don't know what's in the Declaration of Independence and don't own a copy but haven't the faintest idea where to find one.

IT WOULDN'T be a bad plan if every good American made it a point to have both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution framed and hung up in his home or at least of easy access there. It wouldn't do him any harm even to read it and get a fairly definite idea of what's in it.

It wouldn't be a bad plan if some of our many patriotic societies, like the D.A.R., S.A.R., etc., now devoted largely to commemorizing what some one else did some other time, to electing officers and to intensive studies of genealogy, would come down to earth and the business of being of more real use thereon themselves by undertaking the humdrum task of supplying copies of these documents to any one whom they might be able to prevail upon to read them.

(No, it isn't a case of sour grapes with me. Am eligible to a number of them but will certainly never join one while they continue as anemic as they are now.)

The American Legion and similar organizations would do well to adopt the same idea.

INDEED, a chief reason for "quoting" the Declaration above was to drive home the fact that most Americans have only a very vague idea, if any, of the principles, spirit and specific wording of the Declaration and the Constitution. We Americans do considerable mouthing about politics and policies. It would be well if we first acquired some real knowledge of the principles supposed to be the basis of all our politics and policies.

The American Educational Association of Philadelphia used to distribute, free, copies of these documents and may still do so, though their supply was limited. If any of you know of any distributors, please let Camp-Fire know. Better still, yourself get on the job of inducing some patriotic organization to undertake the distribution. I wonder why it's never occurred to proprietors of book-shops that, strange as it may seem, there might even be a sale for copies of these documents if offered in forms suitable for framing or for convenient reference. I venture none of them has ever even considered it and would laugh at the idea.

And you—why not gain a widespread reputation for originality and profound knowledge by really learning something about what everybody ought to know and disseminating it among other Americans? Most Americans are too busy talking politics to know what they're talking about and if some one appeared who could get their feet down on to something really solid it would not only raise him to high respect among them but also would be very helpful to them after they got used to the strange sensation of standing on something.
A. S. H.

OUR Camp-Fire Stations are spreading steadily over the map. Help make them grow. Any qualified person can start a Station.

A STATION may be in any shop, home or other reputable place. The only requirements are that a Station shall display the regular Station sign, provide a box or drawer for mail to be called for and preserve the register book.

No responsibility for mail is assumed by anybody; the Station merely uses ordinary care. Entries in register to be confined to name or serial number, route, destination, permanent address and such other brief notes or remarks as desired; each Station can impose its own limit on space to be used. Registers become permanent property of Station; signs remain property of this magazine, so that if there is due cause of complaint from members a Station can be discontinued by withdrawing sign.

A Station bulletin-board is strongly to be recommended as almost necessary. On it travelers can leave tips as to conditions of trails, etc., resident members can post their names and addresses, such hospitality as they care to offer, calls for any travelers who are familiar with countries these residents once knew, calls for particular men if they happen that way, etc., notices or tips about local facilities and conditions. Letters to resident members can be posted on this bulletin board.

Any one who wishes is a member of Camp-Fire and therefore entitled to the above Station privileges subject to the Keeper's discretion. Those offering hospitality of any kind do so on their own responsibility and at their own risk and can therefore make any discriminations they see fit. Traveling members will naturally be expected to remember that they are merely guests and act accordingly.

Keepers answer letters only if they wish. For local information write "Ask Adventure."

A Station may offer only the required register and mail facilities or enlarge its scope to any degree it pleases. Its possibilities as headquarters for a local club of resident Camp-Fire members are excellent.

The only connection between a Station and this magazine is that stated above, and a Keeper is in no other way responsible to this magazine nor representative of it.

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143—St. Petersburg. J. G. Barnhill, 10 Third St. N.
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262—Wildwood. E. M. Dilly, L. B. 114.
285—Tampa. R. Stuart Murray, Mezzanine Floor, Hillsboro Hotel.
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Georgia—98—Hinesville. R. N. Martin, *The Liberty County Herald*.
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82—Baltimore. Joseph Patti, Jr., 4014 E. Lombard St.
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79—Lansing. Geo. H. Allen, *Lansing Industrial News*, 109½ N. Washington Ave.
106—Gaylord. Sidney M. Cook.
131—North Muskegon. James Fort Forsyth, Forsyth Publisher's Service, Phone 5891.
137—Flint. O'Leary & Livingston, 309 So. Saginaw St.
192—Pickford. Dr. J. A. Cameron, The Grand Theater.
227—Adrian. S. N. Cook, 221 Clinton St.
Minnesota—112—St. Paul. St. Paul *Daily News*, 92 E. Fourth St.
145—St. Cloud. F. T. Tracy, 426 Eighth Ave. N.
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99—Picayune. D. E. Jonson.
268—Pascagoula. C. E. Walter, 239 Orange St.
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94—St. Louis. C. Carter Lee, M. D., 3819 Olive St.
127—Salem. Emmet C. Higgins, 100 N. Tenth St.
289—Nevada. T. S. Hope, 705 N. Clay St.
Montana—240—Fort Missoula, Company C, 4th Infantry.
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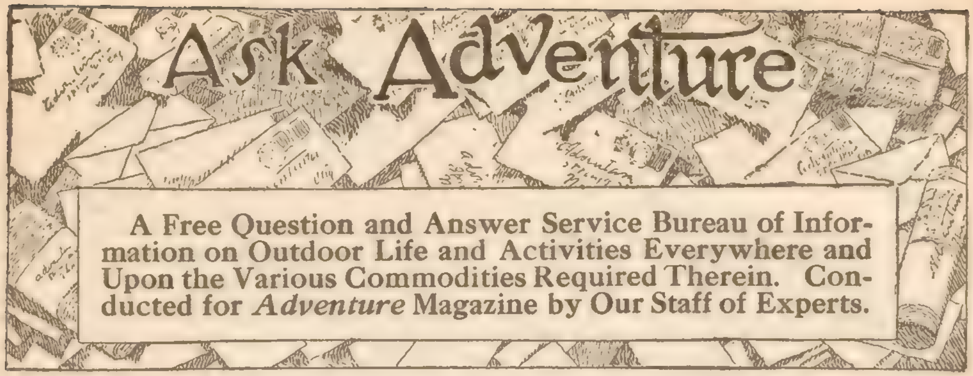

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Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

67. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

68. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, Box 1419 S. W. 5th St., Miami, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

69. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. For all territory *west* of the Penobscot River. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

70. Eastern U. S. Part 7 Eastern Maine
H. B. Stanwood, East Sullivan, Me. For all territory *east* of the Penobscot River. Hunting, fishing, canoeing, mountaineering, guides; general information.

71. Eastern U. S. Part 8 Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., and Mass.
Howard R. Voight, 35 Dawson Ave., West Haven, Conn. Fishing, hunting, travel, roads; business conditions; history.

72. Eastern U. S. Part 9 New Jersey
Francis H. Bent, Farmingdale, N. J. Topography, hunting, fishing; automobile routes; history; general information.

73. Eastern U. S. Part 10 Maryland
Lawrence Edmund Allen, 201 Bowery Ave., Frostburg, Md. Mining, touring, summer resorts, historical places, general information.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J, Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Box 958, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors.—R. W. Gordon, 4 Conant Hall, Cambridge, Mass.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—**All Shotguns,** including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—**All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers,** including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—**Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800.** Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Forestry in the United States

Ernest W. Shaw, South Carver, Mass. Big-game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild-animal life in the forests.

G.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, care *Adventure*. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

H.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St. N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

I.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer, care *Adventure*. *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers Directory, can not be answered.

J.—Navy Matters

Lieut. Francis V. Greene, U. S. N. R., 588 Bergen Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Regulations, history, customs, drill gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered.

K.-American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 1244½ Leighton Ave., Los Angeles, Calif. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

L.—First Aid on the Trail

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. Medical and surgical emergency care, wounds, injuries, common illnesses, diet, pure water, clothing, insect and snake-bite; industrial first aid and sanitation for mines, logging camps, ranches and exploring parties as well as for camping trips of all kinds. First-aid outfits. Meeting all health hazards of the outdoor life, arctic, temperate and tropical zones.

M.—Health-Building Outdoors

Claude P. Fordyce, M. D., Falls City, Neb. How to get well and how to keep well in the open air, where to go and how to travel. Tropical hygiene. General health-building, safe exercise, right food and habits, with as much adaptation as possible to particular cases.

N.—Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada

R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. General-office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General information.

O.—Herpetology

Dr. G. K. Noble, American Museum of Natural History, 77th St., and Central Park West, New York, N. Y. General information concerning reptiles (snakes, lizards, turtles, crocodiles) and amphibians (frogs, toads, salamanders); their customs, habits and distribution.

P.—Entomology

Dr. Frank E. Lutz, Ramsey, N. J. General information about insects and spiders; venomous insects, disease-carrying insects, insects attacking man, etc.; distribution.

Q.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Aaventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries**, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico**, and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti**, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska**, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba**, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American** matters or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.**, Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National **Rifle** Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Wash., D. C.

For whereabouts of **Navy men**, Bureau of Navigation, Navy Department, Wash., D. D.

A Pack-Horse Trip in Colorado

IF YOU'RE getting fed up on autos and their honking, here's how to dodge 'em:

Request:—"I should be very grateful to you for any advice and information you can give me upon a possible pack-horse trip in the Colorado Rockies next summer.

A friend and myself with our two wives would like to spend between two and three weeks in some portion of the mountains which is not much traveled, and where we would not encounter many other campers or find the trails too much ready made. We would, of course, prefer a country with trees and lakes or streams, as well as the necessary forage for the horses, and we would naturally enjoy good scenery in the surrounding mountains.

It is not our desire to make an especially long trip; but when we find a good place we would be willing to make a camp and stay three or four days, thus giving our wives more rest than they would get from hard traveling.

Various suggestions have been made to us concerning the Sangre de Christo Range, the Holy Cross country and the White River country from Yampa or Steamboat Springs.

It may be that there is other country which you know which would be more desirable than any of these, as meeting the desires outlined above, and if not, I should be glad to have you tell me what you can about the above places and which of them would best suit our desires.

I appreciate that I am asking you to go to considerable trouble and can plead, in excuse, only my ignorance of the country, and its long distance from us."—Jerome C. Fisher, Cleveland, O.

Reply, by Mr. Middleton:—I know of several places in the Colorado Rockies which might fill the bill as far as your troubles are concerned, but I know of only one which I am sure will give complete satisfaction. I'll tell you of this place.

I have reference to the Trapper Lake country, distance twenty-five miles from Yampa, Colo. Yampa is on the Denver & Salt Lake Railway, about 190 miles west of Denver. The D. & S. L., by the way, offers one of the very best scenic routes in Colorado between Denver and Yampa. You will find very few campers in this district, which lies twenty-five miles by pack animal from Yampa, although I believe that it is now possible to travel some ten miles of this distance by auto or spring wagon, should one be a little tender on horseback.

There is everything there that your letter seems to indicate you desire. You will have both lake and stream fishing, and some of the very best in

Colorado, too. You will have a country with lakes and streams and trees. You can choose rough country, or just as rough as you want it to be; and, be it three weeks or three months, you will not, to my notion, find a more ideal place in the Colorado Rockies in which to spend your vacation.

Scott Teague, Yampa, furnishes everything in the line of camping outfits, etc., should anything in that line be desired, and you may also engage pack horses from Mr. Teague should you desire to make Yampa your outfitting point; but to be sure of service, by all means write Mr. Teague first. I am sorry that I can not give you the rates per day, but I've heard he is quite reasonable. Then also Mr. Teague has a couple of cabins somewhere in that country that I have no doubt you could arrange to occupy in case you wanted a base of supplies.

I have been in this district twice, and somehow when I get to talking about it I get all wound up. It is one of a very few spots left in Colorado that is truly wild, and the fact of its still being inaccessible to auto, accounts for its still being this way.

The country is large. Large enough to keep one busy all summer with pack animal, but should you desire to work out of it by going north and west, you can do so, and thus get into the Steamboat Springs country—another very beautiful country where one can get away from the beaten trails, but not to be compared to the Trapper Lake country.

I've done the very best I can for you, and should you decide on following my suggestion, write to Scott Teague, Yampa, Colo. Then I'd sure appreciate hearing from you after you have made the trip, telling me just how you liked it.

The full statement of the department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Two-Handed Swords

WEAPONS which were five feet long:

Request:—"1. What was the average length of the two-handed sword used in the late Middle Ages?

2. What was the chief weapon of the Varangian Guard of the Greek emperors?

3. Have any tests been made to ascertain the resistance to modern rifle bullets of medieval plate mail? If so, what were the results?

4. What is the difference between a *tulwar* and a simitar?"—Daniel Jenkins, Coxton, Ky.

Reply, by Mr. Barker:—1. Two-handed swords, *Zweihander*, ranged from a four-foot blade with eighteen-inch handle, to the state sword of Edward V of England, which was five feet eight inches in length. I presume the longest sword known was that belonging to the knight Konrad Schenck de Winstertetten (1209-1240). Length, eight feet two inches, width four inches. Pommel is four inches in diameter, haft six and one-half inches, and hilt ten inches. Strange to relate, this is not a *Zweihander*, but an ordinary sword, although I fail to see how it could have been wielded short of two hands.

2. The chief weapon of the Varangian Guard was a large two-bladed battle-ax, the blades turning different ways, with a sharp steel spike projecting from between them. (I have one.) Handle of elm, iron-guarded, and inlaid and ringed with brass. (See Chap. 2 of Sir Walter Scott's "Count Robert of Paris," and page 83, Vol. VII, of Gibbon's "Roman Empire" (or it may be a different volume and page according to the edition. Look it up under "Varangian" in the index). Also a light, curved simitar.

3. I am unable to tell you of tests of rifle bullets on plate mail.

4. A *tulwar* and simitar are one and the same. Being a curved saber usually single-edged, sometimes double at the third nearest the point. It is interesting to note that the hilt and guard are almost invariably unusually small, so that it seems almost as if made for a woman's hand.

Commercial Salmon Fishing

LITTLE or no chance for the independent fisherman along the Alaskan Coast:

Request:—"May I take a little of your time to ask you a few questions about commercial fishing around Ketchikan, Alaska. What I desire is to buy a power boat and fish for salmon, etc.

Is it profitable?

Fishing season?

Size of power boat necessary?

What will a boat cost new? Second-hand?

About what could I expect to make for the season's work?

What other equipment besides the power boat?

I want to work in the open; I enjoy the sea, although not a sailor, and have no fear of it having been through typhoons and serious storms while serving in the navy during the war on a 5,000 ton ship.

I understand that there is good money in fishing for salmon and the work appeals to me. I am thirty-nine years young, healthy, married, no children and the wife is anxious to go with me.

I will have between $1,500 and $2,500 to work with, so will be able to do what I want, I think.

Where would you suggest buying a boat? Seattle or S. E. Alaska?"—Dan Maskell, Los Angeles, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. B. Brown:—Answering your letter generally, rather than by detail, I will call your attention to these facts: The great majority of the salmon canneries of Alaska are located at isolated places, almost uniformly at the mouth of some river, because the salmon head to the rivers to spawn. Practically no one save the caretakers remain at these canneries after the fishing season closes.

Along in January of each year, these cannery men commence outfitting their fleets of vessels for the north. Some of them have more than a dozen vessels in this trade, which lay up in Lake Union, in Seattle, during the off-season. When the vessels are in condition, their recruiting agents drum up the cannery crews. The companies, as a rule, take north with them not only the cannery workers, but the fishermen. They are outfitted by the company and are paid a fixed price for fish, with charges against them for outfits, etc.

There are few independent fishermen, catching salmon for the canneries of Alaska, while there are thousands of independent fishermen operating from

Puget Sound and from Southern British Columbia. I made personal inquiry at the office of one of the big Alaska canneries regarding your chances, and all that they vouchsafed was that when they started getting ready after the first of January, any man who wanted to fish for them would have to see the superintendent of some cannery and apply for a job.

Every time the season closes and the crews come back from the north, there are bunches of bitterly disgruntled men landed on the beach. Their complaints may be entirely fictitious and without any legitimate basis but, just the same, I do not feel justified in recommending to any man, especially a married man of your age, that he go north to fish for any big cannery. At the same time, I think, judging by the result I have seen, that a man without any very heavy investment, can do fairly well in the salmon fisheries of Puget Sound or Southern British Columbia, and have the satisfaction of living in decent comfort with home surroundings.

"Ask Adventure" service costs you nothing whatever but reply postage and self-addressed envelop.

Hiking in North China

A DANDY, if you don't mind bandits, bears, birds' nests and other minor discomforts:

Request:—"I would greatly appreciate it if you would give me some information about touring in Manchuria. We intend to start from Cape Shantung and proceed to Dairen on foot, if it is at all possible. Do you think it is?

Would we have to take our own provisions? Would a .44 repeating rifle be too heavy? I believe there are bears in the hills, though I don't know whether this is so.

I am enclosing a rough sketch of our march. We're not undertaking this tour for the benefit of any society, we are 'on our own.'

We have plenty of time on our hands, and intend starting about next September, when I've finished with the Navy."—JOHN A. MACLEOD, Weihaiwei, Shantung, China.

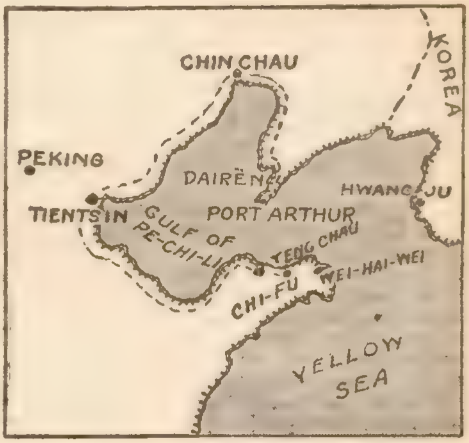
Reply, by Dr. Twomey:—I do not know of any reason why you should not make the trip outlined in your letter. Many men have made longer trips on foot and over more difficult country than that over which you propose to travel.

Until you get out of Shantung you would not have a great deal of use for a high-powered rifle but it would doubtless prove useful after you get to the north and east of Tientsin. I am of the opinion that a twelve-gage shotgun would be very useful on the trip.

I have known people to travel in China and to eat native food for months at a time, but it all depends upon how fond you are of Chinese food. Personally I hate the stuff and most of my friends are of the same opinion. If I were making a trip of this sort I would take along a few articles of foreign food, such as preserved fruits, cheese, milk, bacon and baking-powder and rely on the country to furnish the rest.

When you get into the neighborhood of Dairen and Port Arthur you will be in Japanese territory, so be sure to secure your passport and have it properly vised by the Japanese Consul at Weihaiwei. This will save you a lot of trouble.

There are a number of different dialects spoken in the territory over which you intend to travel, and a knowledge of Mandarin is necessary if you are going to travel without an interpreter. When traveling in China you must furnish your own bed and bedding and this brings up the question of transportation. A couple of pack mules can be secured for a small price and unless your party is to be a large one these will be sufficient to carry all your baggage.



It is possible in many places to find mission stations. If you wish you can stop overnight at these stations, for the missionaries are very hospitable and glad to have visitors. I would suggest, however, that as the missionaries have to pay their own expenses and that they do not have any allowance for the entertainment of visitors, that you offer to pay them or at least to make a small gift for the use of their mission. In most cases this will be declined with thanks, but it is a good idea to offer it.

I have just finished reading a very interesting book about the country over which you intend to hike. It is called "Wandering in North China," by Harry A. Franck. This book is sold by La Librairie Française, Tientsin, for $10.00, Mex. I would advise you to write for a copy and to read it before starting.

I hope that if you decide to make this trip that you will let me have the pleasure of seeing you when you reach Tientsin.

Oranges in Florida

A TWENTY per cent. on your money, maybe:

Request:—"Please find enclosed, self-addressed envelop and five-cent stamp, not attached.

Will you kindly give me a little information concerning orange land near or south of Orlando?

1. Average price of land per acre five to ten miles from a town and on a road.
2. Within two or three miles of a road.
3. Is it possible at any time to buy orange groves in bearing?

4. Average price per acre four years old.

5. Average cost per acre to bring oranges into production.

6. Average profit per acre per year from oranges.

I'm in the banana business now and realize that the above questions are hard to answer definitely, so I expect only an approximate figure to enable me to determine whether I could get or swing a small proposition next year.

I understand that bananas are now being grown in the south of Florida; do you know whether they are successful or not?"—A. F. Furman, Estrella, Costa Rica.

Reply, by Mr. Liebe:—Your questions I am taking up in the order in which you asked them:

1. The average price of land per acre five or ten miles from a town and on a road would be, I should say, around $40 per acre. Some would come higher and some lower; so many things govern the price of land, you know. By the way, oranges had a terrific slump in 1924. I am a little afraid of overproduction in the future.

2. Land within two or three miles of a road would come at probably around $30 per acre on an average. Fair orange land, that is.

3. It is always possible to buy orange groves in bearing, though the price is usually pretty high—running up to $2,000 per acre. Of course, you can pick up a bargain sometimes. You probably could do it right now.

4. The *average* price per acre of a four-years-old grove would run in the neighborhood of $800, I should say. Groves pay very little before the sixth year and not a great deal before the seventh year.

5. Average cost per acre to bring oranges into production? It's hard to say. One man will do it cheaper than another; from $200 per acre up perhaps. Original cost of land, clearing land, setting trees, cost of trees, pruning, spraying, fertilization, working grove; all these items vary in cost.

6. As to profit, counting back ten years; including the bad year of 1924, I think oranges have paid an average of twenty per centum on the investment.

Yes, bananas are being grown in Florida, but I'm not sure they are a success commercially. Heretofore I have seen only the small, round, short "lady-finger" type, but I understand the Cavendish variety is promising something now. If the United States would ever find out that avocados are about the best and most nutritious things on earth, there would be a fortune in avocados—alligator pears, you know. I am told that they pay very well as it is, though they won't grow well very far north of Miami being very susceptible to chill.

This, I believe, finishes up your questions. I'm wishing you all kinds of good luck certainly.

Land Colonies in South America

NOT as successful as they might be:

Request:—"Sometime ago I heard something about the McMurray land colony in Bolivia, and wonder if you could offer any information concerning it.

Is it just another real estate scheme or the plan of some enterprising farmers? What are its inhabitants like? Its grazing land and its crops? What is land worth? Where can I get some good books on Bolivia?"—J. Oscar Stanton.

Reply, by Mr. Young:—There are several of these land-colonization projects in various parts of eastern Peru and Bolivia, but none of them seem to be making an eminent success out of the undertaking. My own opinion is that a man would do better by going there and getting his own land, which can be done with very little money, and going it alone. There is some good land in various parts of these countries and with a fair amount of nerve and luck a man should be able to make himself independent if not wealthy.

The Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., will be able to give you the details of the McMurray's progress up to the present. Also get this society to send you their booklet on Bolivia, also on Peru. For geography of the country see the Encyclopedia Britannica in your public library.

Canoeing in Southeastern Ontario

WHERE the waterways are many and paddling is easy:

Request:—" I am contemplating a canoe trip of at least three months, starting if possible from New York City. I am interested in knowing the topography of the region you cover and its canoe-trip possibilities. I intend to rough it and keep off the beaten path.

What canoe would you suggest—canvas or cedar? What months would you advise? What paraphernalia both in clothes and food and duffle? How is the hunting and the fishing? Cost of license?

Thank you in advance for any information you can send me."—J. Remignanto, Jersey City, N. J.

Reply, by Mr. Moore.—This region (Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario) is ideal for canoeing and fishing and you can rough it as much as you wish.

Would advise you to come up here after June fifteenth, when bass, 'lunge, pickerel, etc., are in season. You can not hunt here, as there is no open season for anything at that time of the year, and you will be unable to fish unless you purchase an angling license which costs you five dollars. This license is not transferable and on the face of it appears your identification. I know this part of it well for I am deputy game warden and issue these licenses during the open season.

As regards canoe—I can not see a great deal of difference. You can go for miles here without lifting your canoe out of the water, while, if you wish, you can go to places with portages and rough water enough to fill any man's wants.

I am not going to give you any routes. Instead I would advise you to send sixty cents to Mr. J. E. Chalifour, Chief Geographer, Department of the Interior, Ottawa, Canada, and ask him to send you the Pembroke, Ottawa, Kingston and Belleville sheets of the Topographical Survey Map. Join up that map and you will find routes everywhere. Lots of them, and the distances easily figured up. You will be well received everywhere you go—you will feel like being at home.

Now as regards your equipment. Be easy on your back if you have to portage. Small silk tent, or pup tent, rubber ground sheet, blankets, hand ax, flashlight, small kit of dishes, light and heavy underwear for sudden change in temperature caused sometimes by heavy rains, some good fly oil—and you are well away. Your food and the quantity you will need will depend entirely on yourself. You can buy most everything up here and in any quantity you desire. You need never be more than a few hours' paddling from a grocery store unless you want to.

I think this will answer your letter. If it does not let me know and I will try again. I really don't infer from your letter that you want me to send you a list in detail of the quantity of food required per day, etc. And so I am merely sketching your wants for you. Fill them in at your own desire.

Tales of Lost City

A WHERE household utensils are said to be made of gold:

Request:—"Can you tell me about the lost city of Bacis in Sinaloa, Mexico, and if it has been explored during the last few years?"—BLANCHE ALLEN, Los Gatos, Calif.

Reply, by Mr. Mahaffey:—Around the city of Culiacan, the capital of the Mexican State of Sinaloa, and along the West Coast of Mexico, there has grown up a legend about the Lost City of Bacis. Up in the interior of Sinaloa there is a little village called Bacis and the lost city is supposed to be inland even farther, up a river which runs through this town. It is said that oranges, and carved bits of wood, also oddly woven cloth, have floated down this stream, but as it is impassable, all attempts to find this lost city have failed.

The local people believe that there is a remnant of one of the ancient tribes of Mexico who live there and that their homes are furnished with gold utensils, and that there are many orchards there. Even the Indians do not travel in the hills where this lost city is supposed to be. Many prospectors have attempted to find the place but it has all been in vain.

I understand there is an expedition on foot at the present to find this place but do not know just who is back of it. Naturally very little, if anything, is known about this mythical place and information is lacking, even if the lost city really exists, which is doubtful, to say the least.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, ***give your own name if possible.*** All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ABBOTT, W. V., Co. A, 20th Inf. In P. I. 1904. Last known address, 49 N. Ashland Ave., Chicago, Ill. Please write.—Address W. H. HALL, 55 Highland Ave., Arlington, Mass.

DOUGLAS, WILLIAM. Was with machine gun company 62nd Inf. at Camp Fremont, Calif. in 1918; served with the A.E.F. in Siberia, 1919. Last heard of was in Los Angeles, Calif. His buddy would like to hear from him.—Address J. L. BONITA, Waltman, Wyoming.

ISAAC, MAURICE. Emigrated from Wales, Great Britain; lived near New York Mills, New York. Died about 1870. One descendant, Maurice, resides at Manchester, England. Any other please communicate.—Address C. B. ISAAC, 706 Observatory Bldg., Des Moines, Iowa.

STEEN, LEW (or Stein). Last heard of in Indiana several years ago. Any information will be appreciated by his niece.—Address MRS. RUTH DOIG, 147 N. New Hampshire, Los Angeles, California.

RED POTTER, Tommy Watson, Robert Burton, or any of the old crowd from the Glen or Palisade Ave., please write to me.—Address W. R. C. WALSH, Hq. Det. & Com. Train, 1st Bn. 4th Field Art., Gatun, Panama Canal Zone.

BROWN, LENNOX DENHAM. Last heard of in Alexandria, Egypt, summer of 1922. Write to your brother.—Address ROYDEN T. BROWN, Trail, B. C., Canada.

STINSON. Formerly residents of County Derry, Ireland. Thomas Stinson (my father) is still a resident there. The other members of the family are believed to have gone to the U. S. A. and Australia. Any information will be appreciated.—Address J. I. STINSON, Hulatt, B. C., Canada.

THEAL, ARTHUR N. Left Chicago, Ill. about one year ago. Any information will be appreciated by his wife who is very anxious to hear from him.—Address MRS. ARTHUR THEAL, care of Mr. Lester Johnston, 721 W. 71st St., Chicago, Ill.

BALDWIN, HARRY. Left his home in Sharon, Pa. about five years ago. Last heard of Dec., 1921, when he was in the west, headed for California. About 5 feet 4 inches tall, dark wavy hair, brown eyes, age about 40 years. Has a wife and three children in Pennsylvania. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MRS. J. M. WAID, 1413 14th Ave., Greeley, Calif.

C. F. E. Please write to me through my friend in pink house and she will forward letters to me. I am working in a hospital in C. Francis is in working boys' home. Robert is boarding in A. Have bright hopes for next summer at A. Had summer boarders and expect to do fine next year. *Adventure* has a letter for you from me.—LILLIAN, VERA C.

NOLAN, PAUL F. Last heard from at Fort Worth, Texas, Dec. 26, 1924. Age 22 years, weight about 175 pounds; brown eyes; dark, thick hair inclined to be curly; height 5 feet 8 inches. We are homesick and lonesome for you. Do telegraph or write at once.—Address MOTHER, FATHER AND SISTERS.

SMITH, ROBERT AND SAMUEL BURNS. Their sister, Mrs. R. H. Smith and daughter Gladys, who left Toronto, Ont., Can. for Denver, Colorado in 1922 or 1923. They purchased property in Denver at that time, but can not now be traced. Supposed to have gone to San José, Calif. Any information will be appreciated.—Address FRED T. HILL, Riverhurst, Sask., Canada.

GIFFS, EVERETT. Last heard from in Montana, employed in a lumber camp. Age 53 years. Dark hair and eyes, and a big scar across his face. Was born in Hendricks Co., Indiana. Had three sisters, whose names were Anna, Mary and Susie. Also six brothers: their names were Daniel, William, Theodore, Thomas, Merrit, and Johnnie. Any information will be appreciated.—Address L. J. KING, 1607½ Bellefontaine Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

MICHELL. Last heard from in California. Have not heard from him since World War. Folks are anxious to hear from you.—Address MR. AND MRS. A. BENDER, 1715 Clifton Ave., Rockford, Ill.

"BATESY" or "Decsty." Worked on the government examiners corps on the Snake River from Twin Falls to Smalley Springs in Idaho in the fall of 1908. Write Jack, care of *Adventure*, giving your address.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

FRAKE, WILLIAM. 5 feet 5 inches; dark brown hair, brown eyes, weight 148 pounds, discharged from Fort Monroe, Va., April 21, 1923. Any information will be appreciated by his brother.—Address WALTER R. FRAKE, 5212 Woodland Ave., Philadelphia, Pa.

BLYSTONE, VERNON. Write home at once; your mother needs you.—Address J. M. BLYSTONE (father) Y.M.C.A., Fort Worth, Texas.

WOULD like to hear from any of my old pals in Pittsburgh, north side.—Address LLOYD F. HOEY, 15 Remington St., Cambridge, Mass.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

TROSTLER, JOSEPH S. Last heard of when he left Omaha, Nebraska in 1916. May have joined Canadian E.F. or later A.E.F. Age 45, 5 feet 5 inches tall; stout, dark complexion, baritone voice, good at billiards and cards. Any information will be appreciated.—Address B. T., care of *Adventure.*

THE following have been inquired for in either the April 10 or April 30, 1925, issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

BROWN, GEORGE; Beyersdorfer, Albert G. (Joe Bush) Cummins, Norman; Corning, Harold; Dreyer, Herbert; Dutton, Lousa or Lousa Thomas or Elizabeth Brin; Holliday, Robert Emmett; Leggat, John; Lewis, Oscar; McMahon, Andy; McMorrow, Paddy and Denis; Nolte, Walter; O'Connor, John J.; Ordway, Charles P.; Shumbarger, Edward H.

MISCELLANEOUS—Angle; Bert; Darling Jack please let me know where you are, Kaufman.

Unclaimed Mail: MOORE, TED.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MAY 30TH ISSUE

Besides the **new serial** and the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

SALVAGE An Off-the-Trail Story — ***Charles King Van Riper***
The tropics sap a man's self-confidence.

HARD WOOD Conclusion — ***Arthur O. Friel***
"Us hill folks always comes back."

FINES AND FEES — ***Raymond S. Spears***
Sheriffs and hunger beset the vagrant.

FOUR ANNAS — ***Negley Farson***
British fliers in Egyptian sands.

HANDSOME ISN'T — ***L. Paul***
Lemuel, the he-cook, couldn't be shamed.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long* stories by Georges Surdez, Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, Charles Victor Fischer, Leonard H. Nason, L. Patrick Greene, Frank Robertson, Hugh Pendexter, Talbot Mundy, Gordon MacCreagh and W. C. Tuttle; and short stories by George Bruce Marquis, John Beames, Warren Elliot Carleton, Alex McLaren, David Thibault, Alan LeMay, F. St. Mars, Rolf Bennett, Theodore Seixas Solomons, John Webb and others; stories of gobs in the Atlantic fleet, prospectors in the silver country, Indian detectives on the reservation, doughboys on the Western Front, traders in Africa, skippers off Georges Banks, beachcombers in the South Seas, trail runners in the snow country, ancient Romans in the British Isles, explorers up the Amazon, cowboys on the Western range, bandits in Bosnia.

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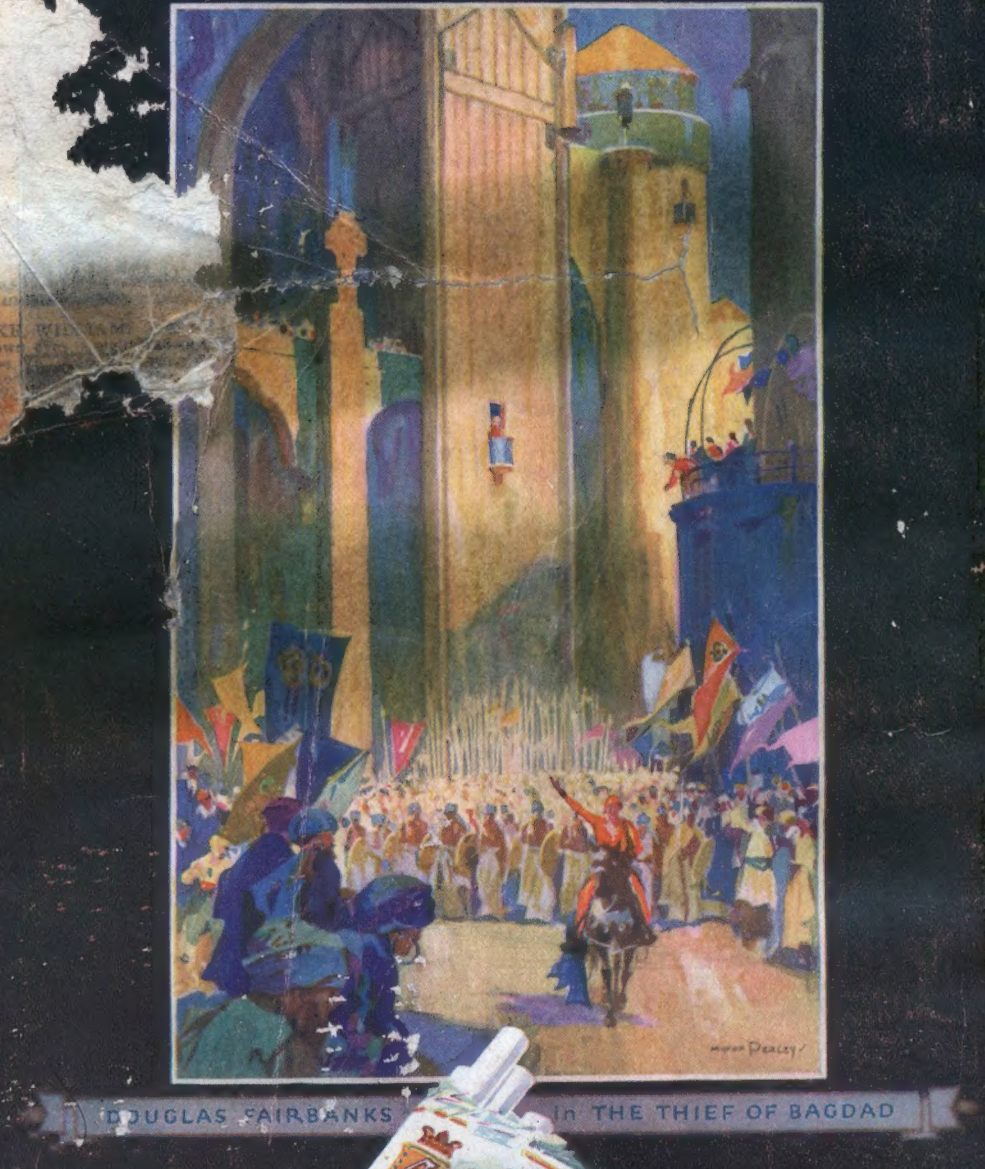
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